

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	25 November 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Youth Participation in global decision making
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/25/263
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Shona Milne
REPORT AUTHOR	Brian Webb
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 At Council on 28th April 2025, the spirit of the Pact for the Future was endorsed and the Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning was instructed to bring a report to a future meeting of the Education and Children's Services Committee outlining what the Council could do to promote the involvement of our young people in expanding and strengthening youth participation in global decision-making. This report delivers against that instruction.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Note the content of this report; and
- 2.2 Endorse plans to have young people shape global initiatives, continue to secure global opportunities and make effective use of digital to amplify voice.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

3.1 Youth participation across the Council

Aberdeen City Council already delivers a range of youth initiatives with global relevance and impact, empowering young people aged 12–25 to engage as active citizens in international contexts. These initiatives, some of which are outlined below, build on the strong foundations laid in the early years and primary education, where children are supported to inform decisions that affect them, fostering a culture of participation from the earliest stages.

- **Shadow Board:** On going work progresses to establish a Shadow Board for the Children Services Board (CSB). The Shadow Board aims to build a better future for all children and young people in Aberdeen City by ensuring their voices directly influence decisions made by adult leaders and services.

- **Climate Leadership:** Through the Youth Climate Change Group, young people have led education and advocacy efforts on climate action, biodiversity, and sustainability. Collaborations with national and global partners have positioned Aberdeen's youth as contributors to international environmental goals.
- **Child voice and representation:** All schools continue to have a range of pupil led groups who drive improvement and inform practice at school and community level. In the majority of cases, children and young people set agendas and record decisions and many are now organising and hosting community events.
- **Youth Voice & Representation:** The Aberdeen Youth Movement (AYM) enables young people to influence decision-making locally and globally. AYM members participate in civic forums, mentoring programmes, and national Youth Parliaments, amplifying Aberdeen's voice on the international stage. The Young Ambassadors group use creative approaches to champion change in Aberdeen, ensuring children and young people's ideas are heard and brought to those who influence decisions.
- **Youth-Led Funding & Innovation:** The Youth Activity Grants programme supports youth-led projects that promote creativity, inclusion, and leadership. With young people steering funding decisions, the programme fosters global citizenship and community impact.
- **Engagement with Council Leaders:** Aberdeen Youth Movement, and young people from further and higher education institutions across the city have scheduled opportunities to engage with Council leaders in order to make suggestions and raised concerns.

3.2 The opportunities afforded to young people in the city has resulted in the city's youth having a growing international presence which is exemplified through the two examples below:

- AYM member Mariah Ichakpa represented the city at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC) Youth Forum in New York, highlighting Aberdeen's commitment to youth empowerment.
- Lily MacDonald (AYM member and Aberdeen graduate) has been awarded a prestigious Fulbright-American University Scholarship, making her the only Scot, and one of just 16 UK recipients, accepted into the programme. She will study at American University's School of Public Affairs, learning from leading experts including President Obama's former speechwriter. Lily shared: "*The idea of community is in my DNA... I want to see what community healing looks like in America and take that back to the projects I'm already involved with here.*" Her journey exemplifies the global reach and ambition of AYM members and how they are empowered to seek out such opportunities for themselves.

3.3 In September 2024 The Summit For The Future took place at the United Nations headquarters. This was a once in a generation opportunity to enhance international cooperation and tackle current and future challenges in relation to climate change, digital transformation and social inequalities.

3.4 **The United Nations Youth 2030 Strategy**

In response to the Summit for the Future, the United Nations released Phase 2 of the [Youth 2030 Strategy](#) in May 2025. The Strategy aims to increase youth-led organisations' access to opportunities, resources, and policymaking spaces globally, regionally, and nationally. The Strategy focussed on 6 key areas and is a helpful reference point to guide the work of our young people, given that there are opportunities for our young people to be involved in the opportunities outlined in the strategy. The six key areas of focus are:

- Empowering and engaging youth meaningfully.
- Boosting Sustainable Development Goals implementation with and for youth.
- Advancing knowledge and enhancing capacity for working with and for youth.
- Unlocking resources for the youth agenda.
- Transforming the UN workforce and organizational culture.
- Strengthening accountability systems for working with and for youth.

3.5 It is important to recognise that the city has a strong foundation to build upon. In considering how the Council could further promote the involvement of our young people in expanding and strengthening youth participation in global decision-making, care has been taken to build upon the strength already evident locally.

3.6 The following initiatives have been identified as helpful next steps and are deliverable within existing budgets.

3.7 **Shaping global Initiatives**

As Aberdeen prepares for city-wide events of national and international significance, such as City Centre Heritage redevelopment, future Tall Ship races, and a prospective City of Culture bid, there is a vital opportunity to maximise youth exchange, voice, and decision-making.

3.6 By embedding young people in the planning and delivery of these landmark initiatives, we can foster civic pride, global awareness, and leadership. This includes ensuring youth representation in funding panels, co-designing cultural programming, and facilitating international exchange through partnerships and events.

3.7 Considering the inclusion of accessible global youth conferences, hybrid streaming in community venues, youth-led satellite events, and inclusive outreach through schools and media will empower young voices and strengthen community ties.

3.8 To support this ambition, it will be essential to prioritise releasing staff capacity to enable and sustain additional youth initiatives aligned with globally significant

city events. Post-event forums and digital archives can sustain engagement and ensure that youth contributions shape the legacy of Aberdeen's cultural ambitions.

- 3.9 Aberdeen Youth Movement will secure time with the Chief Officer City Development and Regeneration to determine how best to move this action forward.

- 3.10 **Securing Global Opportunities**

As outlined at paragraph 3.2, involvement in youth participation groups such as Aberdeen Youth Movement is creating inclusive self-directed routes for young people to engage with international opportunities. These pathways not only encourage young people to explore exchange programmes and study tours but also expose them to diverse perspectives and innovative global solutions.

- 3.11 Aberdeen City Council's commitment to youth voice and democracy creates an empowering environment that places youth participation at its core. By recognising and investing in grassroots leadership, the Council acknowledges that transformative change often begins with young people themselves.

- 3.12 Through initiatives such as the Aberdeen Youth Movement and international partnerships, young people are empowered to confidently engage in global pathways, fostering ambition, leadership, and a sense of global belonging. It also encourages participation in high-impact forums such as the United Nations Youth Assembly, strengthens collaborations with international organisations, and enables our city's young people to be part of youth-led projects addressing global challenges like climate change, inequality, and peacebuilding.

- 3.13 By enabling attendance at key international events and signposting to young people to funding opportunities, Aberdeen ensures its young people are represented and engaged on the world stage and helps young people to realise their ambitions. This work will be maintained.

- 3.14 **Leveraging Digital Platforms**

Digital platforms offer powerful ways to build on existing national and international connections, enabling global collaboration and openness to new opportunities.

- 3.13 AYM's emerging partnership with youth group "Yappers" in Southern Ireland, illustrates this, with early efforts focused on knowledge sharing around social media and podcasting.

- 3.14 Future plans include a joint project on young women, consent, and personal safety. Through youth-led forums and digital tools, young people can amplify their voices and co-create solutions across borders. This work will be prioritised over the coming months.

- 3.15 **Conclusion**

The work we are currently doing and plans for future are strongly underpinned by the six key areas in the Youth Strategy for 2030. Opportunities will continue to be sought for participation in international forums which will elevate

Aberdeen's profile as a progressive, youth-friendly city, while the fresh perspectives of young people can drive policy innovation, leading to more inclusive and effective governance.

- 3.16 By continuing to implement these initiatives, and through providing opportunities for all young people to become involved we will continue to amplify youth voices in local and global decision-making. This proactive engagement not only empowers the next generation of leaders but also fosters a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future, one where young people are not just heard, but are integral to shaping the city and world they will inherit.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no financial implications for this report

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Failure to comply with the duties outlined in the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 presents significant risk to the Council in meeting its statutory obligations as described in the Act and exposure to potential legal remedy.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No environmental impacts identified.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Risks of the city not providing a supported platform for youth participation in global decision making	Delivery of the Children Services Plan, UNCRC Plan, Delivery of the city's commitment to youth participation and empowerment,	L	Yes
Compliance	Under UNCRC - Non-compliance would place us in breach of legislation and expose the local authority	Mitigated through implementation of UNCRC to ensure systems and processes are aligned to statutory guidance.	L	Yes

	to potential legal challenge.			
Operational	Staff feel unable to access the support required by some young people. participate on a global level	Mitigated by basing a dedicated team around the young people of the city who want to participate	L	Yes
Financial	Willingness to promote this cannot be achieved through lack of staff time to support	Mitigated by basing a dedicated team around the young people of the city who want to participate	L	Yes
Reputational	Risk of reputational damage through non engagement in global decision making	Mitigated through the ongoing UNCRC delivery plan and increasing awareness and opportunities across the city	L	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>Council Delivery Plan 2024</u>	
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement <u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u>	Impact of Report This report highlights how the UNCRC is helping to shape the service delivery model for children and young people and supporting the commitment to a transparent, accessible and accountable Council.
<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026</u>	
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	<i>The proposals within this report support the delivery of all Children & Young People Stretch Outcome 4 in the LOIP</i> 4. 90% of children and young people report they feel listened to all of the time by 2026.
Regional and City Strategies	<i>Example:</i> <i>The proposals within this report link in and support the councils LOIP Improvement project focused on the development and expansion of the ways in which we communicate with and involve children and young people in the planning and development of our work across the city (Page 11) CSP-Annual-Report-2024-25-Workforce-Summary-FINAL.pdf</i>

	Aberdeen City National Improvement Framework Plan for 2022 – 26 and the Children’s Services Plan 2023-26 UNCRC Plan.pdf Aberdeen’s Community Learning and Development Plan 2025-2030
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9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	No assessment required. I confirm this has been discussed and agreed with Shona Milne Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning
Data Protection Impact Assessment	None Required

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None

11. APPENDICES

11.1 None

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Name	Brian Webb
Title	Youth Development Officer – Youth participation
Email Address	BWebb@aberdeencity.gov.uk