

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee

Council

Date of Committee

31 October 2006

Report Title

Local Democracy Week

Summary

To advise members of the programme of events and activities undertaken or launched during Local Democracy Week 16-19 October and to identify any action arising from the feedback from participants and improvements for future events.

For further information please contact:

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Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework?

No.

Background papers

None

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:

Details to be specified

Other Committees

.....

Local Member(s)

N/A

Other Elected Members

County Councillors Chris Davis, Tim Naylor and Jill Dill-Russell, Helen McCarthy, Richard Chattaway

Cabinet Member

County Councillors Alan Farnell, Peter Fowler and Izzi Seccombe.

Chief Executive

.....

Legal

.....

- Finance
- Other Chief Officers
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals

FINAL DECISION YES

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet
- To an O & S Committee
- To an Area Committee
- Further Consultation

Council - 31 October 2006.

Local Democracy Week 16-20 October 2006

**Report of the Strategic Director of Performance and
Development**

Recommendations

- (1) That the Council notes the activities undertaken during Local Democracy Week and launch of further activities.
- (2) That the feedback from participants (young people and councillors) be noted and form the basis for future events aimed at engaging people in local democracy.

1.0 Introduction – what is Local Democracy Week?

- 1.1 Local Democracy Week was first launched by the Local Government Association in 1999 and the Local Democracy Campaign evolved from this and the focus of 2005 was on 'Local Democracy Year,' capitalising on the recent general election. Although there is still a week each year that has become the focus of the campaign, local authorities are encouraged to keep the momentum going throughout the year by engaging with communities, and with young people in particular.
- 1.2 There are a number of national objectives for each year and for 2006 the theme is 'Take part, take power' and the campaign's aims are to:
 - make councils more relevant and useful to young people
 - encourage young people to 'take part, take power'
 - make Local Democracy Week bigger and better than before
 - increase councillor involvement in citizenship teaching in schools
 - get councils to devolve power, wherever appropriate, to local people.
- 1.3 Obviously some of these aims cannot be met in just one week of activities. The first and last objectives, in particular, are part of a wider agenda about how the Council operates, how it listens to the communities it serves and works with them and partners to find solutions to the issues that concern them. Some of these aspects are being driven through the new ways of working agenda, through customer access, partnership building, the Local Area Agreement, neighbourhood communities all within a culture of greater openness and communication with our citizens. The ODPM report "*All Our*

Futures: The challenges for local governance in 2015" (April 2006) claimed that community leadership is likely to be the single most important feature of local governance and greater citizen engagement within the structure of local governance is essential. An essential part of ensuring engagement is the promotion of local government and citizenship so that people see its relevance to them, rather than as a bureaucratic machine, and that they can influence the decisions that affect them.

2.0 What have we done in previous years?

- 2.1 In 2005 the County Council focussed on active citizenship and how the business community could promote this. Activities were:
- Two 'business breakfasts' were held for the local business community and speakers included representatives from the voluntary sector and from Barclays and Jaguar, both of whom have developed employee volunteering schemes.
 - 'Give us a minute' flyer to all staff with their monthly payslips highlighting the ways in which they could become active citizens.
 - A leaflet was circulated to the public via libraries and the business breakfasts promoting ways of becoming active citizens, including school governors, volunteers and parish councillors.
 - Weblogs were written by a member of each political group, demonstrating the issues they faced in their day to day work as councillors.

In 2004 there was an online question and answer facility where young people could post their question and get a response from elected members and weblogs were also written by a member of each political group.

3.0 What do we want to achieve in 2006?

- 3.1 There have been a number of drivers for this year's programme. Aside from the national impetus on engagement, our Councillors have been increasingly expressing a desire to have greater engagement with their public, including young people, as well as current service users. This theme has come up in a number of areas, most notably in the recent review of overview and scrutiny where there is a drive to 'get out there' to see what is happening on the ground. Members may also recall the Council meeting where there was engagement between groups of members and young people and a powerful performance from two care leavers, describing the issues they face.
- 3.2 The Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee have also expressed a need for a greater involvement with young people and especially support the need to increase awareness of the role of the County Council and the democratic process.
- 3.3 The following are some of the benefits we hope will emerge from Local Democracy Week.

- To provide another channel for young people to air their views and be heard by (and influence) those who make decisions that affect them.
- To increase understanding of the role of elected members in the community – and of their relevance to young people.
- To encourage engagement/interest and voter turnout. Although much of the target audience will not yet be of voting age, the events will help them understand the importance of voting when they are older and perhaps convey this message to their families and friends. The website activities and press publicity around the events will also raise awareness.
- To raise the profile of the local government and of the Council – over 85% of council services are used by young people.
- To improve links with young people for consultation work – for benefit to young people and to the Council in shaping policy.
- To promote partnership – working with districts and boroughs, MPs, MEPs, parish councillors and bodies involved with young people.

4.0 The Programme of Events

4.1 The assistants to the political groups undertook research on activities used by other authorities and suggested on the local democracy week website: <http://www.localdemocracyweek.info>. They canvassed the views of a number of Members, including the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the following activities were chosen:

- Political Speed Dating
- Schools debate
- Local Journalist Competition
- Weblogs
- Take your councillor to school day
- Democracy games

4.2 Consultation took place with districts and boroughs, the County Youth Forum, and colleagues in the Area Teams and Children, Young People and Families Directorate and contact made with schools to identify young people to take part in activities.

4.3 Details of how each event to date are set out below. Young people were given information packs in advance of the events with some information on what each tier of government does, and some key facts and figures, to help stimulate their thinking. Each of the events included the opportunity for young people to give their feedback on the events and what they have gained from them.

4.4 An article on the week's events will appear in the LGIU 'Councillor' magazine and will appear on the Local Democracy Week website.

5.0 Political Speed Dating

5.1 What is it?

The principle of political speed dating is that it allows young people a 'one to one' short meeting with a number of councillors. In common with conventional speed dating, each session consists of short 'dates' in an informal setting. The dates last a few minutes (we decided on three minutes), during which time the young people can ask questions on anything except age, party affiliation and place of residence of the councillor. This is the opportunity for young people to ask about issues that affect their lives and to learn about what councillors and local government does and could do for them. It is also an opportunity for councillors to find out what issues are of concern to young people and how they might tackle them.

Unlike conventional dating – the scoring is one-way! Member Services designed a scorecard for use at the events, with each young person being invited to give a score from 1-3 for each councillor according to the following criteria:

1. Approachability
2. Listening skills
3. Understanding your (*the young person's*) issues
4. Answering your (*the young person's*) questions.

Feedback forms have also been designed for both young people and for councillors to complete at the conclusion of each speed dating event. (These are attached at appendix A).

5.2 Planning the events

Member Services joined forces with colleagues in the districts and boroughs to agree the information we would give to participants, the format of the events and to identify councillors from district, borough and county and, where possible, parishes/towns. Hugh Disley, Head of the Young People Division and his colleagues within the district areas, helped to identify young people who wished to take part. A speed date has been arranged for each district area. Two have taken place to date.

5.3 North Warwickshire – Tuesday 17 October

This was attended by 14 councillors representing all tiers of local government and by 20 young people (ranging in age from 11 – 23). Councillor Peter Fowler compered this event which was held in the Red Lion Hotel in Atherstone.

The young people were very positive in both their scoring of the councillors (according to the criteria listed above at 5.1) and in their appreciation of the event as evidenced in the completion of the evaluation forms. The young people said they enjoyed and learned from the events. The forms also provided an opportunity to highlight issues of concern (question 8). It may not

be surprising that sports/leisure and 'things to do' for young people scored highly, but the results also show a concern for issues that affect everybody's quality of life – community safety, care for the vulnerable, creating and maintaining a good environment, ensuring good transport links. (See the summary in Appendix B)

The feedback from the 14 councillors revealed the issues they had picked up from the young people (summarised in Appendix C). A number of comments about the event were made and are listed at the end of the appendix in answer to question 5 on the evaluation form.

5.4 Stratford-on-Avon – Wednesday 18 October

The event was attended by 10 young people (aged 11-14) and 10 councillors. It was compered by Daniel Bruce, a presenter from Touch FM Radio. Councillors received high scores from the young people and the feedback revealed similar issues to those raised in North Warwickshire. A summary of the young people's responses is set out at Appendix D, and the councillor's responses are in Appendix E.

This was a shorter event than that held in North Warwickshire and gave time for some comments from the participants:

From councillors:

"There was an impressive range of questions from the young people"

"I was impressed by the expression from the young people of their care for their schools and their communities".

"We need to understand young people and they need to know what we can do for them, and how they can be empowered."

From young people:

"This was great. I learned that councillors are controlling a lot of what is happening where I live."

"I have more understanding now of what councillors do and who to talk to."

5.5 Summary

The feedback from both events revealed that participants would have liked longer than three minutes. As one participant said it was more like 'speed talking than speed dating'! There was a strong view from participants that there should be more events like this that enable young people's views to be brought to politicians.

5.6 Future political speed dating events

There are a further three:

- Warwick - Monday 20 November, to be compered by District Councillor Bob Crowther.
- Rugby – Tuesday 28 November
- Nuneaton & Bedworth – details to be confirmed.

6.0 **Schools Debate and Question Time**

6.1 This took place on the evening of Thursday 19 October. It was attended by students from four schools and Warwickshire College, including the following invitees who also formed a panel for the Question Time session:

MYPs: Charlotte Kelk, Jess Coupe, Mark Smith and Bryony Howell

MEPs: Malcolm Harbour, Liz Lynne and Mike Natrass

MP: Jeremy Wright

County Councillors Jill Dill-Russell, Tim Naylor and Izzi Seccombe (who gave feedback on the debates)

County Councillor Chris Davis, Chair of Council was assisted by Dr Eric Wood and Councillor Alan Farnell in running both the debating sessions and a question time session.

6.2 Students (listed below) from Rugby High School and Lawrence Sheriff School put forward their arguments for and against the following motions:

“That voting in elections should be compulsory”

(proposers: Ellen Dew and Natalie Shinkwin; opposers: Tom Clark and Ben Rous)

“That the healthy eating regime in schools has been taken too far.”

(proposers: Andrew Bell and Helen Zhou; opposers: Linda Wang and Steven Richmond)

As well as all those present voting on the debates, the panel of three county councillors gave their feedback on the quality of the debate based on the content, communication skills and strength of arguments of the debaters.

The school audience, MYPs and politicians also gave their views and this interactive nature of the event was continued into the Question Time session in which the panel of politicians and MYPs gave their responses to some testing questions from the young audience, ranging from reducing the voting age to 16 to Madonna’s decision to adopt a child.

6.3 Summary

The feedback from the participants, including the politicians, young people and teachers who attended, has been very positive. Some of this is recorded on the County Council website, and in the views of the ‘bloggers’ (see below).

It is hoped that the event will encourage other schools to be on the debating teams in future.

7.0 Weblogs

7.1 These are on-line diaries on the Warwickshire website whereby the 'blogger' gives a brief biography and then says what they have been doing each day and the issues that have arisen. This provides the public with an insight into the day to day working of the local authority.

7.2 These ran during the week with the following bloggers:

Councillors: Richard Chattaway, Chris Davis and Helen McCarthy.

Officers: Jim Graham, Chief Executive; David Clarke, Strategic Director of Resources; William Brown, Strategic Director of Community Protection; Hugh Disley, Head of Young People, Children, Young People and Families Directorate; Helena Toogood, Performance and Development and Rachel Baconnet, Environment and Economy.

7.3 Participants have said they have enjoyed doing these diaries and one noted that this has provided a time to reflect on what they are doing as well as a way of sharing views with others.

Comments from staff have revealed that they have found it an accessible and enjoyable way of finding out what colleagues and councillors do and the issues they confront, some of which may be relevant to them in their own areas of work. This could be continued – with different bloggers- all year round.

8.0 Other Events

8.1 Local Journalist Competition

This was launched during the week at events, on the website and through fliers sent to schools and youth groups. The competition is open to young people aged 11-18 and they are being invited to write an article on any issue, which will be judged by a panel of councillors and journalists. The closing date is 1 December. The winning entry will be published in Warwickshire View and the winner will have a day behind the scenes at the BBC Coventry and Warwickshire Radio Station.

8.2 Take your councillor to school day.

The aim of this activity is to give Members an insight into young people's lives. Members will spend a half or full day with a young person at school or college. This could cover a variety of school types and could include shadowing a young person with a special educational need or a young carer, according to the interests of the particular Member. A number of Members have already expressed interest and these visits will be arranged in the coming months.

8.3 Democracy Games

This is developed nationally but has been adapted, free of charge, for use on our local democracy week website. This aims to develop citizenship skills of young people through the use of computer games.

www.demgames.org

9.0 **Conclusion**

This is the first time that Member Services has run these types of events for Local Democracy Week and we are grateful for the advice and support of colleagues in the Children, Young People and Families Directorate and of our partners in the districts and boroughs.

Feedback from Members and participants is welcome so that we can improve events and possibly extend them to reach more groups of the community and to have activities throughout the year. In this way the promotion of democracy becomes a natural part of the Council's activities.

DAVID CARTER
Strategic Director of Performance
and Development
Shire Hall
Warwick
20 October 2006

Political Speed Dating Feedback Form for Young People

About you:

Are you: Male Female

How old are you: _____

Do you vote or if you could, would you? Yes No

About the event:

Please ring the number that best represents your response to the question.

Do you feel you learnt anything from this event?

No 1 2 3 4 5 **Yes**

How would you rate your feelings towards politics and politicians now that you have participated in this event?

Negative 1 2 3 4 5 **Positive**

Overall how much did you enjoy this event?

Did not enjoy the event 1 2 3 4 5 **Really enjoyed the event**

Are you more likely to vote now that you have participated in this event?

Yes No

After listening to local politicians from Warwickshire talk about what they do, can you please tell us the top three issues that you feel are important in making Warwickshire a better place in which to live and learn.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

If you would like to make any other comments please do so over the page.

Political Speed Dating Feedback Form - Councillor

Name:

Authority:

About the event:

Please ring the number that best represents your response to the question.

Do you feel you benefited from participating in this event?

No 1 2 3 4 5 **Yes**

Do you feel you have a greater understanding of the interests and issues facing young people in Warwickshire today?

No 1 2 3 4 5 **Yes**

What three issues facing young people today became most apparent from the session?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Overall, how much did you enjoy this event?

I did not enjoy the event 1 2 3 4 5 **I enjoyed the event**

If this event ran again next year, would you attend?

Yes No

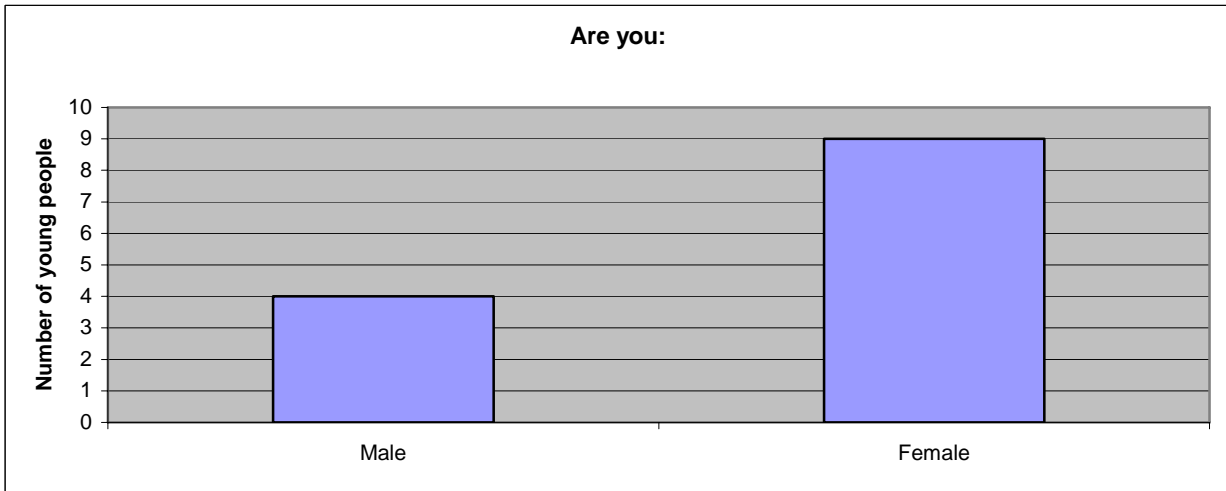
If you would like to make any other comments please do so here:

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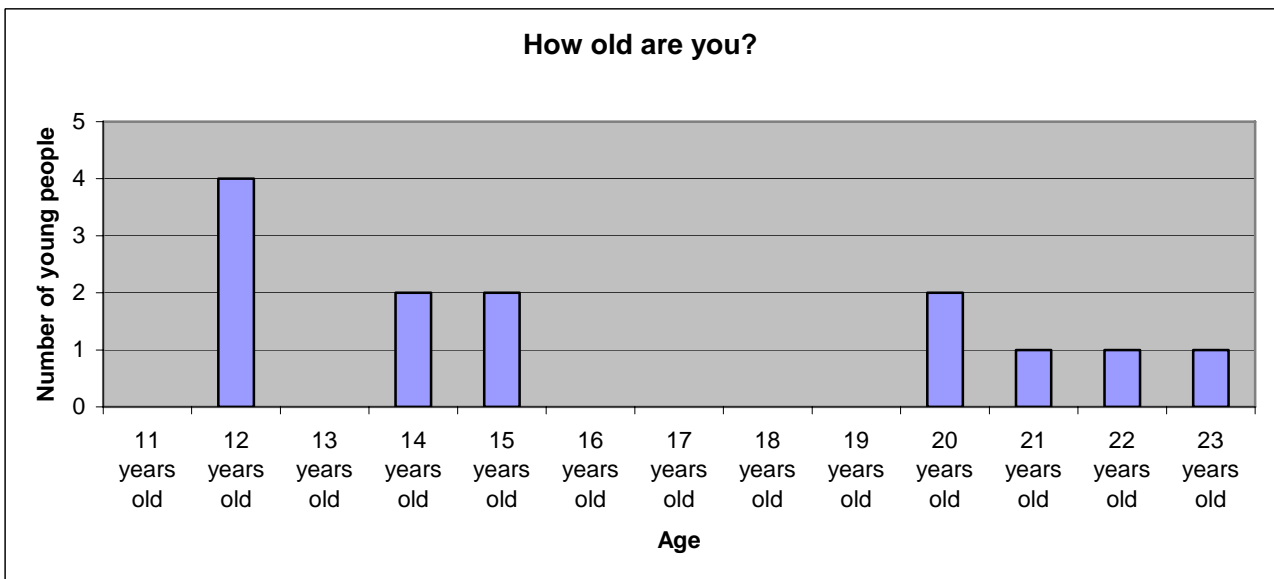
For more information about Local Democracy Week events in Warwickshire please visit www.warwickshire.gov.uk/ldw06

North Warwickshire Political Speed Dating – Young People's Feedback

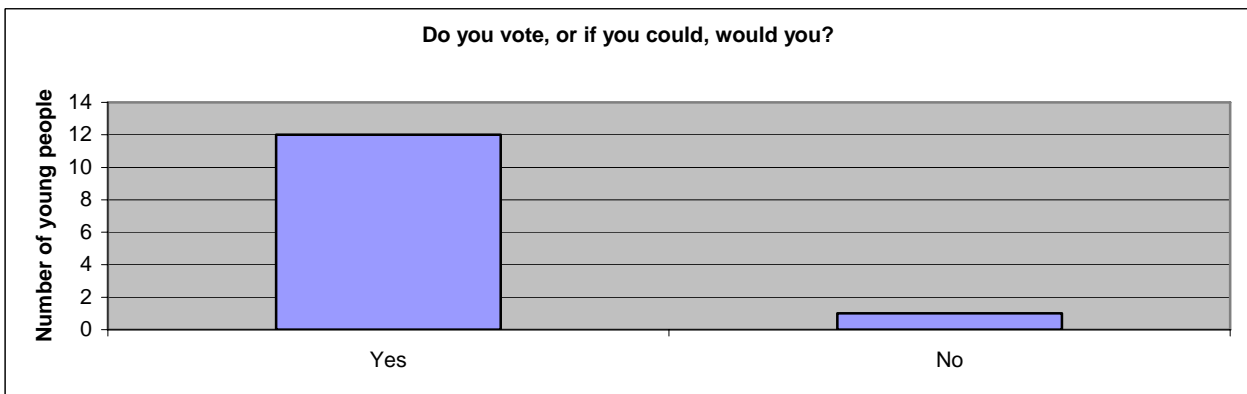
Question 1



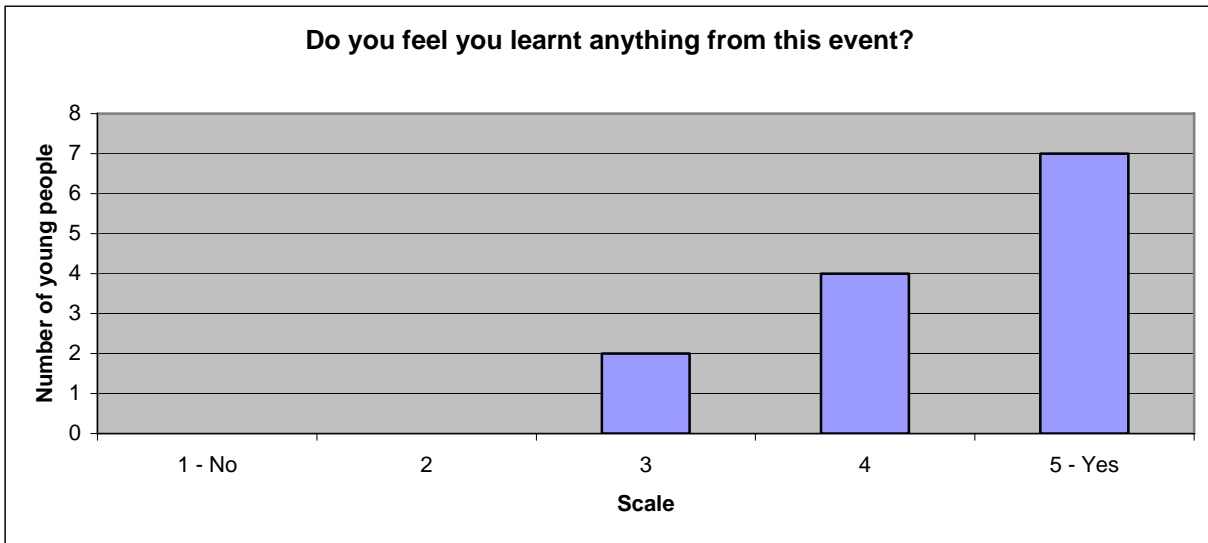
Question 2



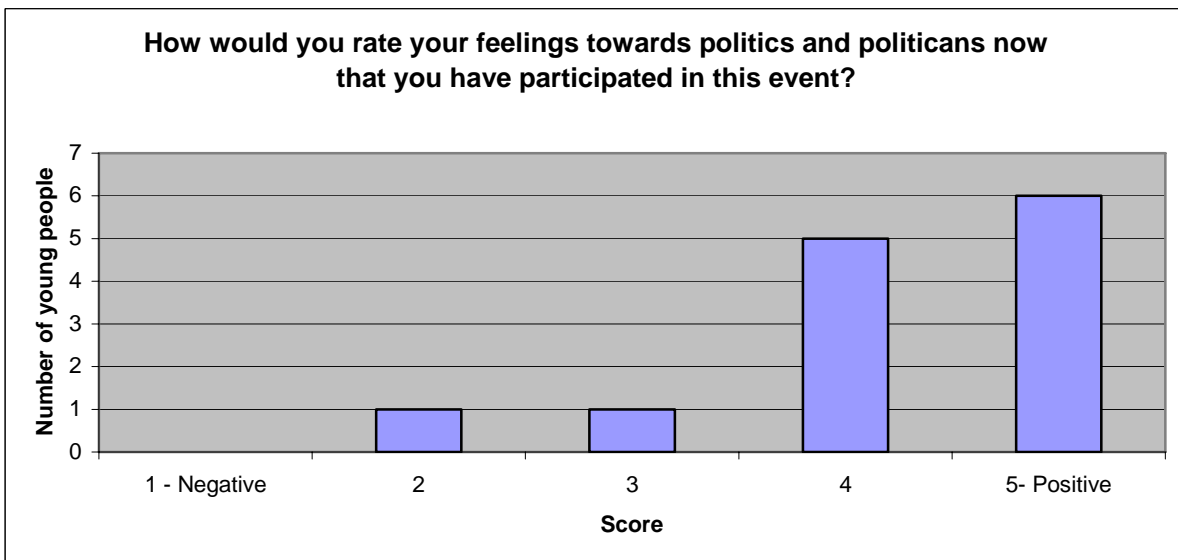
Question 3



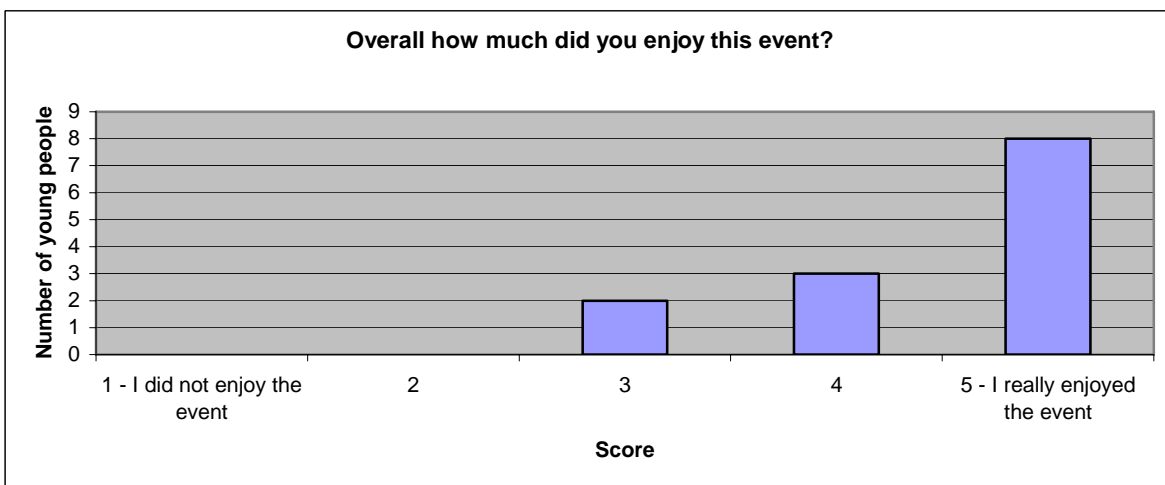
Question 4



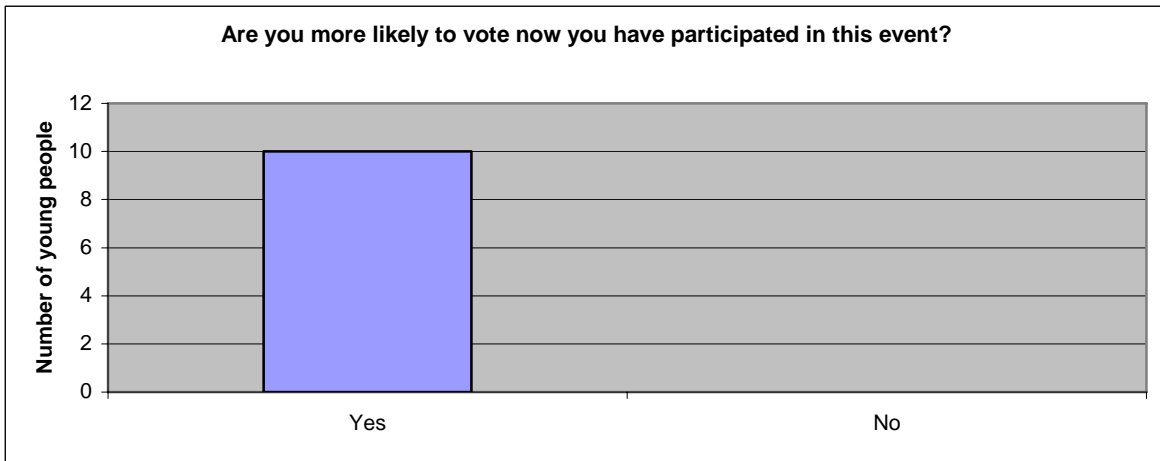
Question 5



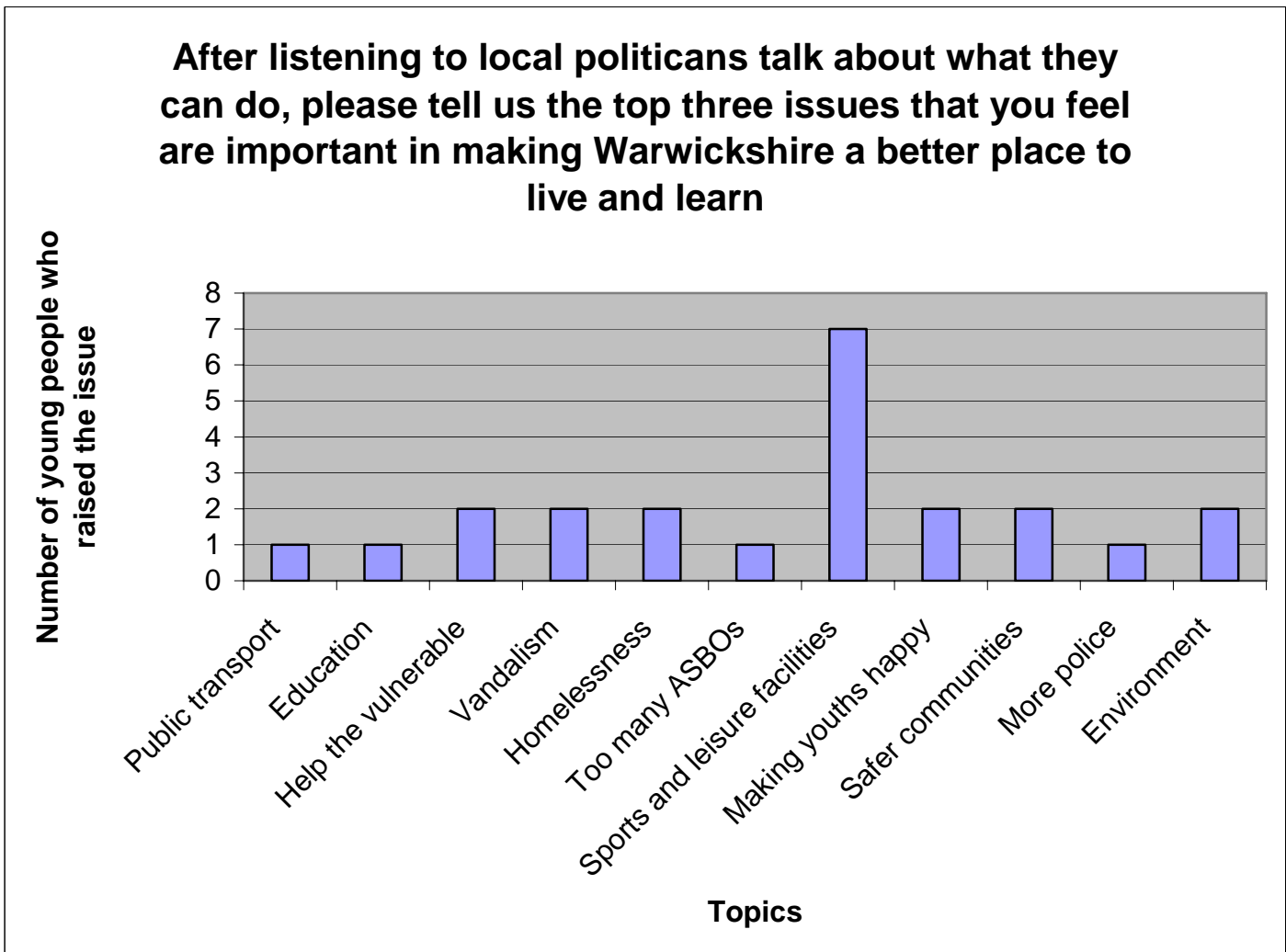
Question 6



Question 7



Question 8

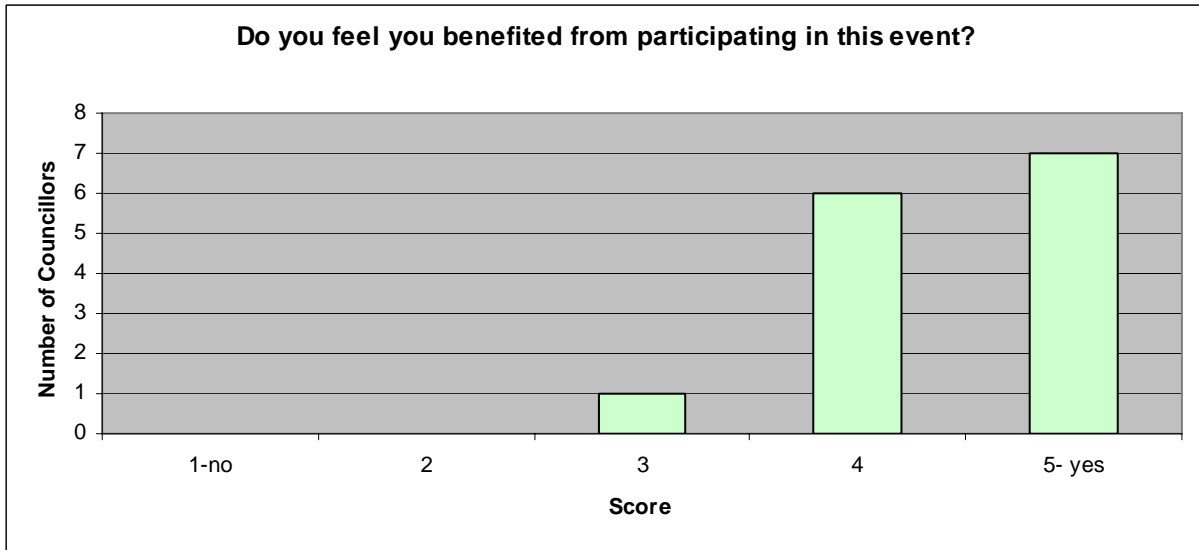


Comments:

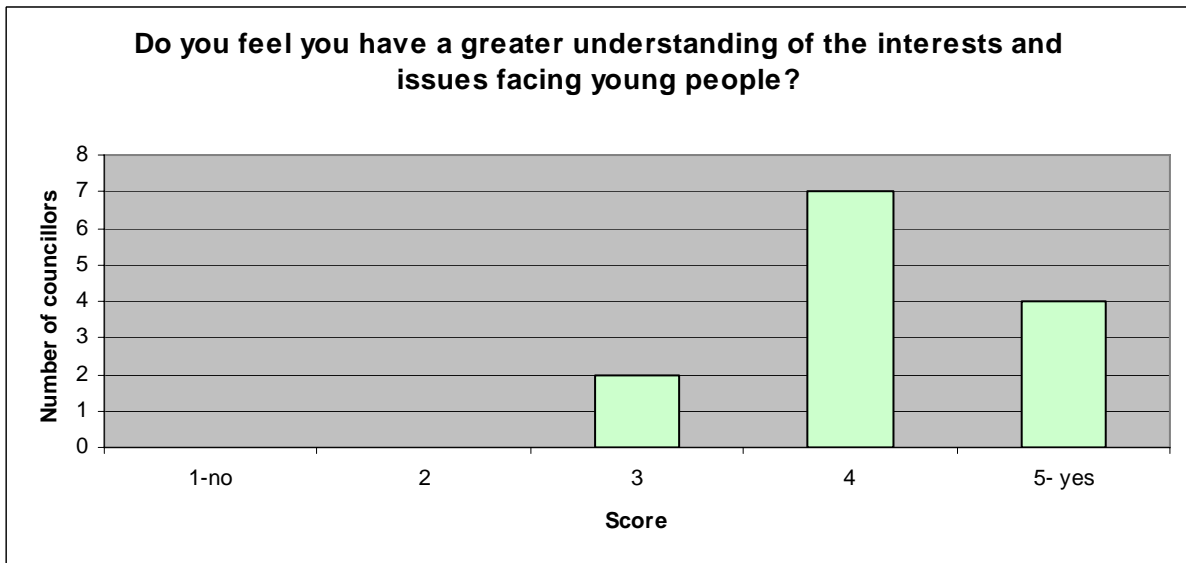
Young people should talk to their councils/better contact with councils is needed
 More money is needed to make Warwickshire a better place in which to live and learn

North Warwickshire Political Speed Dating – Councillor Feedback

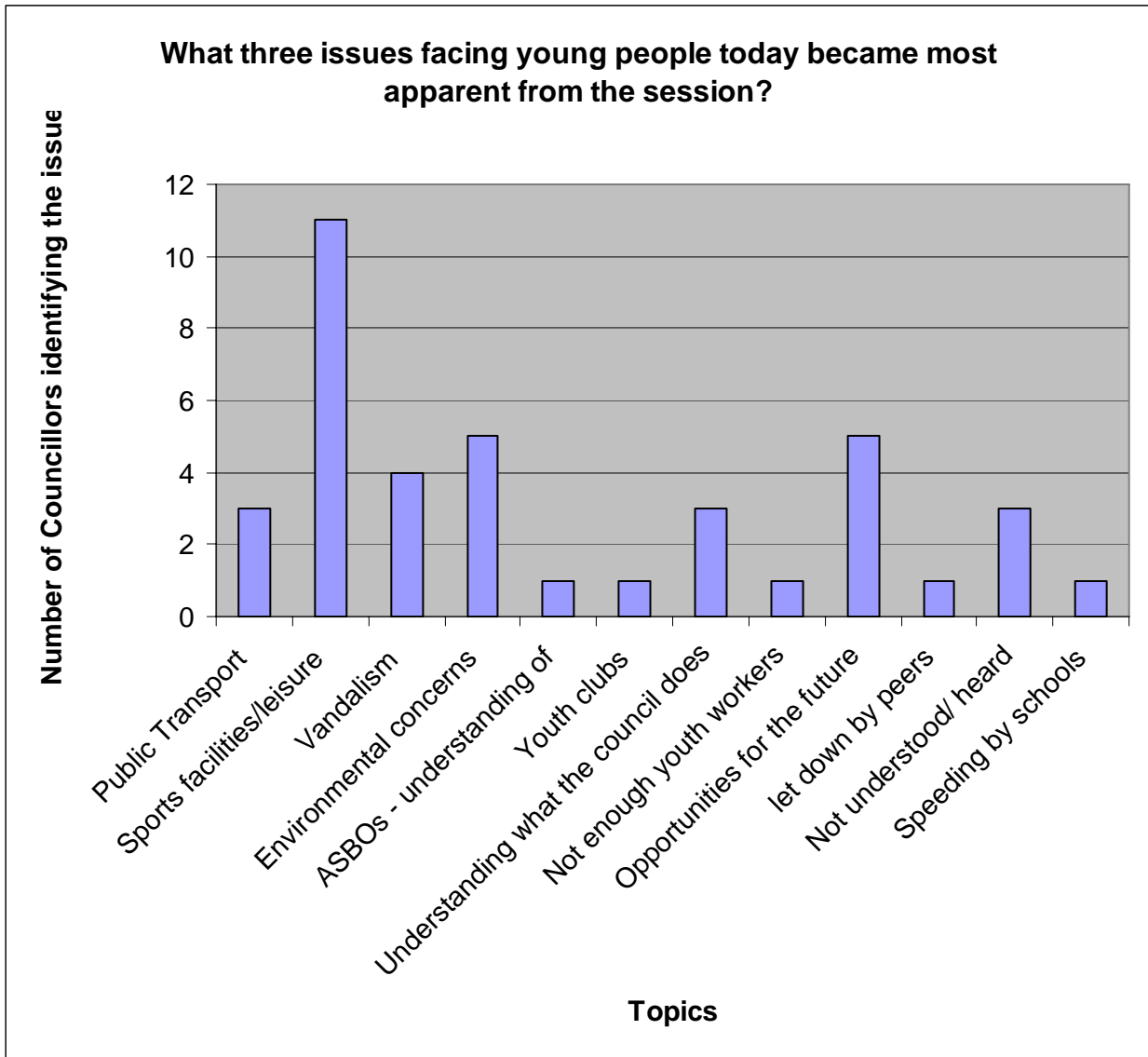
Question 1



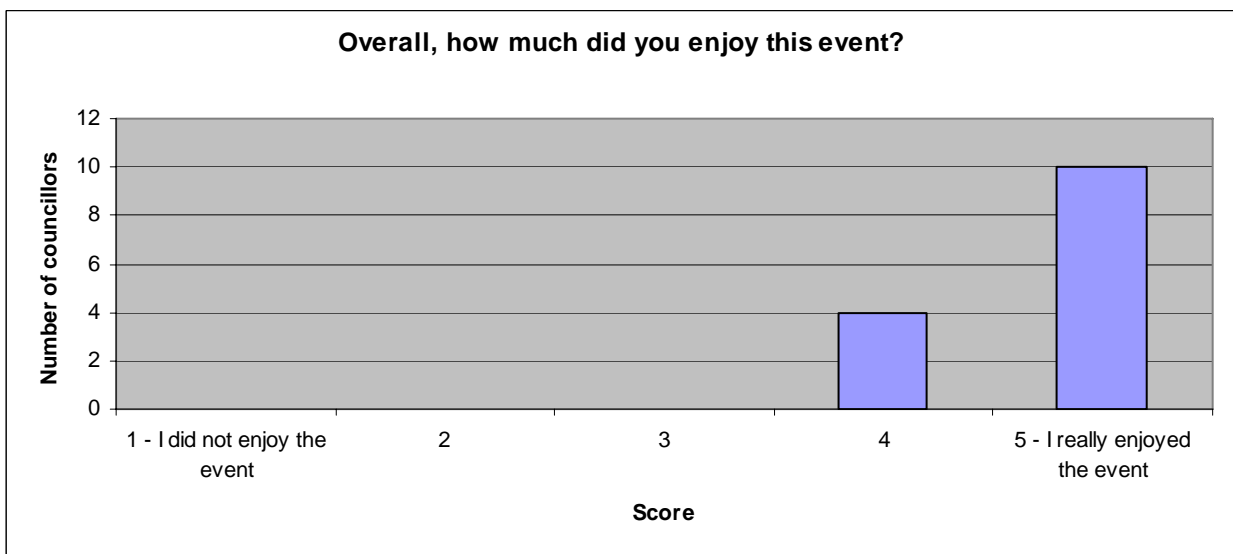
Question 2



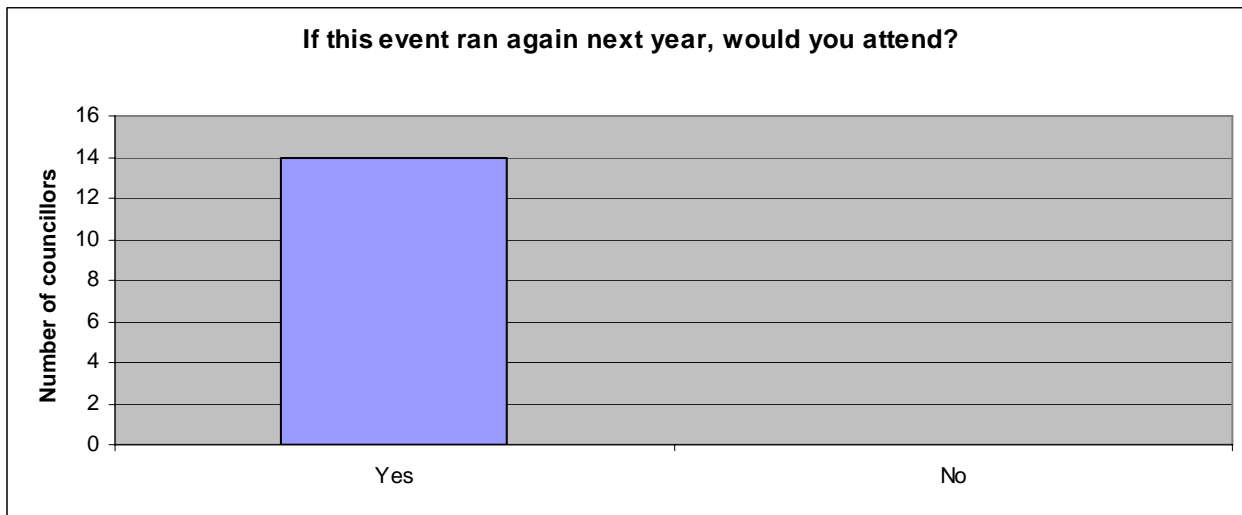
Question 3



Question 4



Question 5



Comments.

This should be a regular event - funds should be found.

Excellent opportunity - thanks for arranging this chance to meet young people.

Something must be done to answer young peoples' requests, not false promises - take the question to forums and WCC.

More information for young people on the tiers of government.

Event extremely rewarding.

Event very rewarding.

Very surprised by their knowledge.

I think it would be a good idea for this event to be run in all schools and colleges.

Need more partnership working to address the young people's concerns.

Everybody was a bit too close so it was rather loud and difficult to hear the young person.

There was a high level of noise.

Time went quickly in most cases, although a couple of youngsters were struggling.

More interaction with young people would help us to understand the issues and concerns they have.

Slightly noisy and cramped.

More time was needed.

Some of the youngsters seem very unsure of themselves.

Would like to opportunity for more of a two-way conversation.

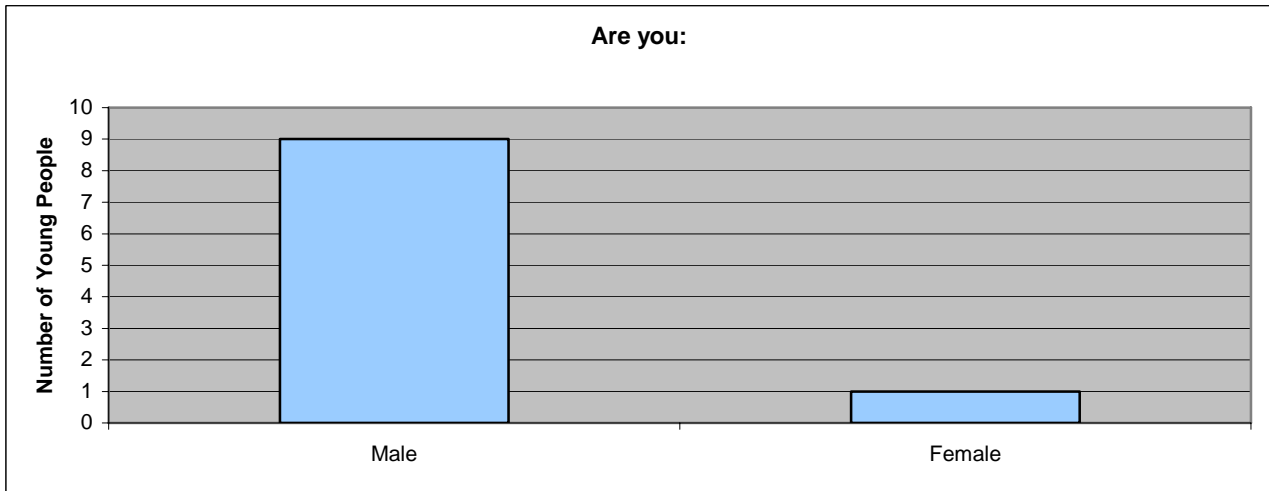
Time limit was frustrating - often interrupted at the point of real discovery and exchange, but I recognise this system did enable more young people and councillors to have contact.

Good idea! I hope the youngsters will get more involved with local government as a result.

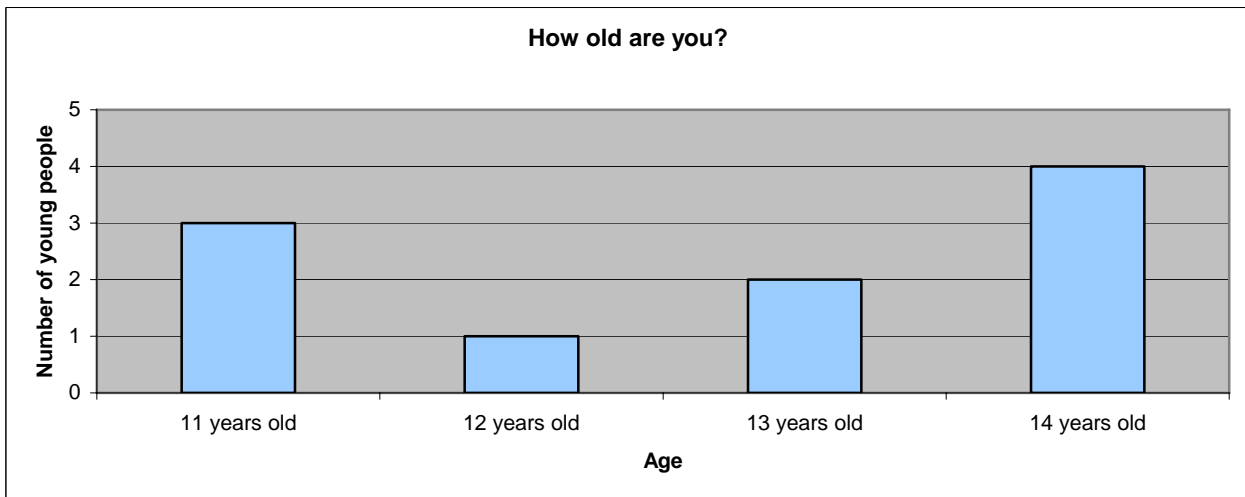
Council – 31 October 2006 - Item 4 Appendix D

Stratford-on-Avon political Speed Dating – Feedback from Young People

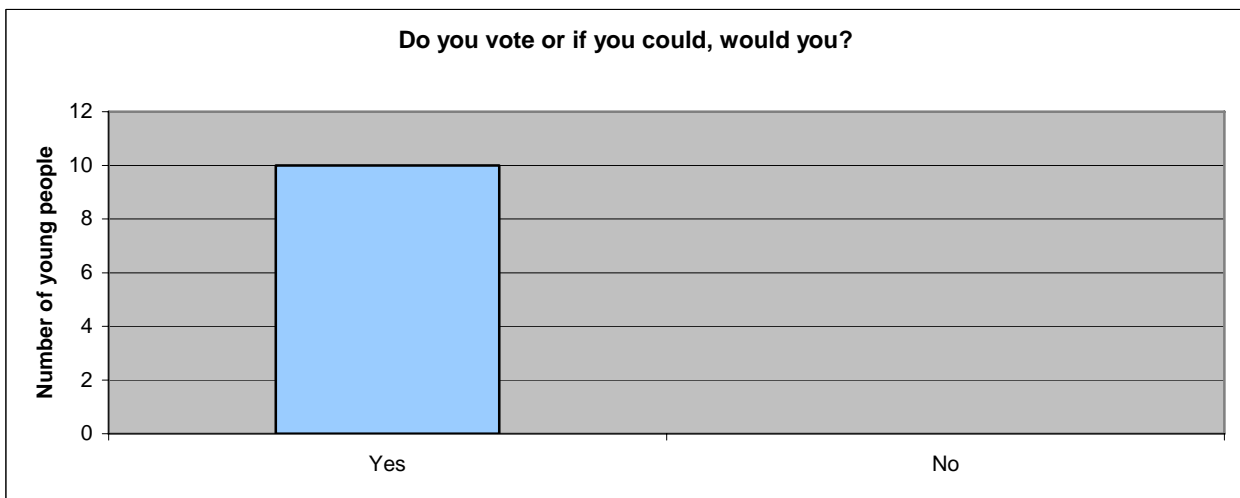
Question 1



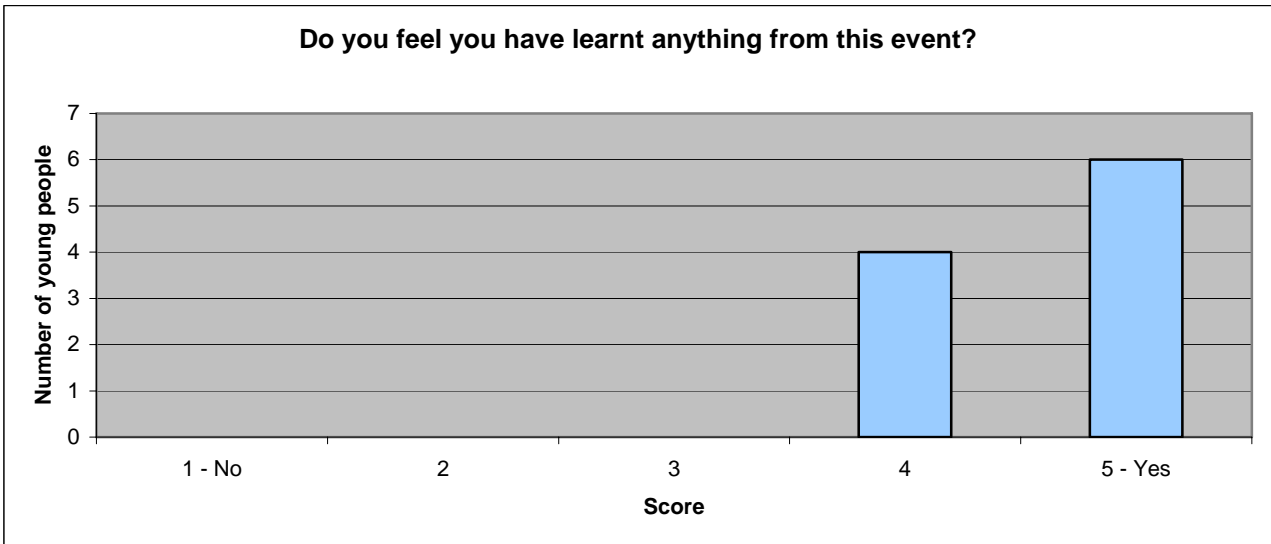
Question 2



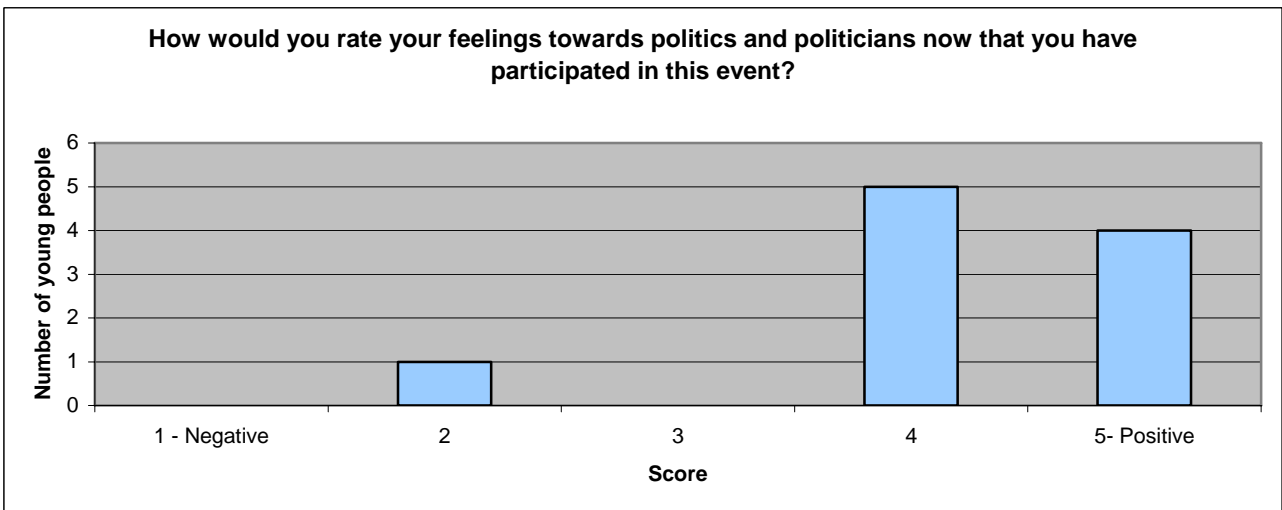
Question 3



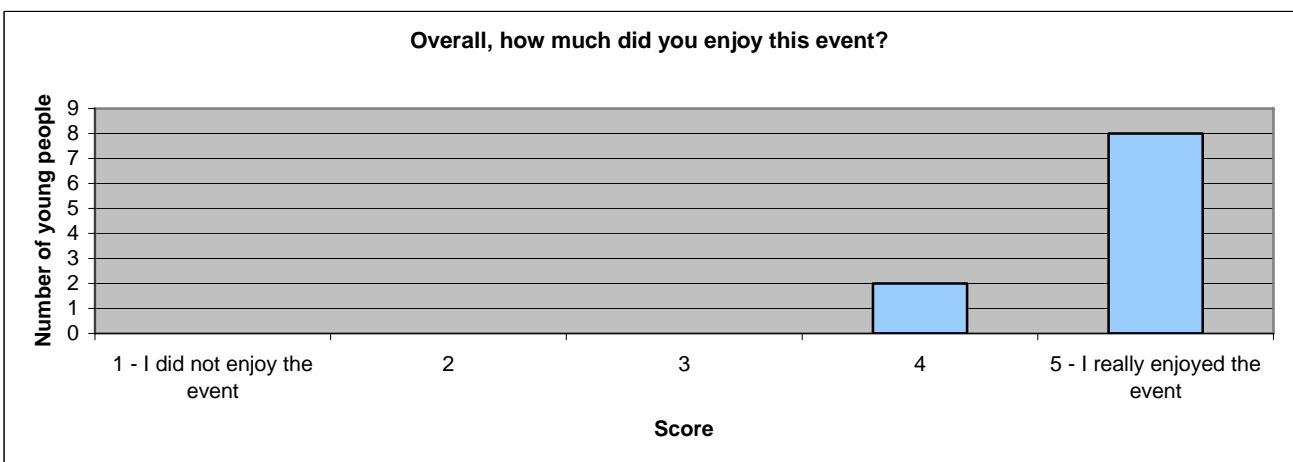
Question 4



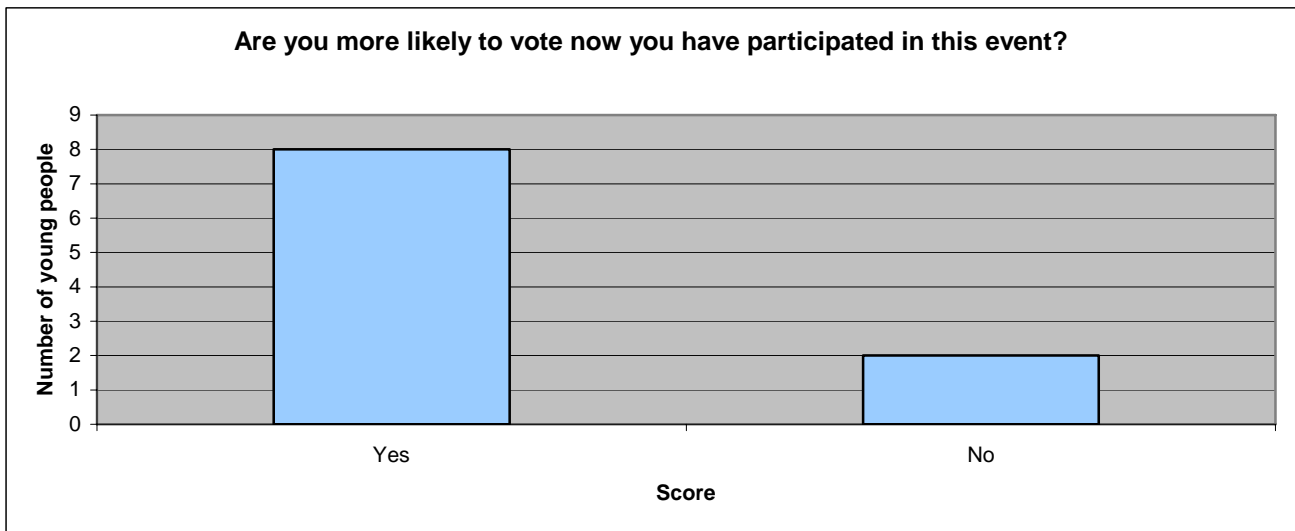
Question 5



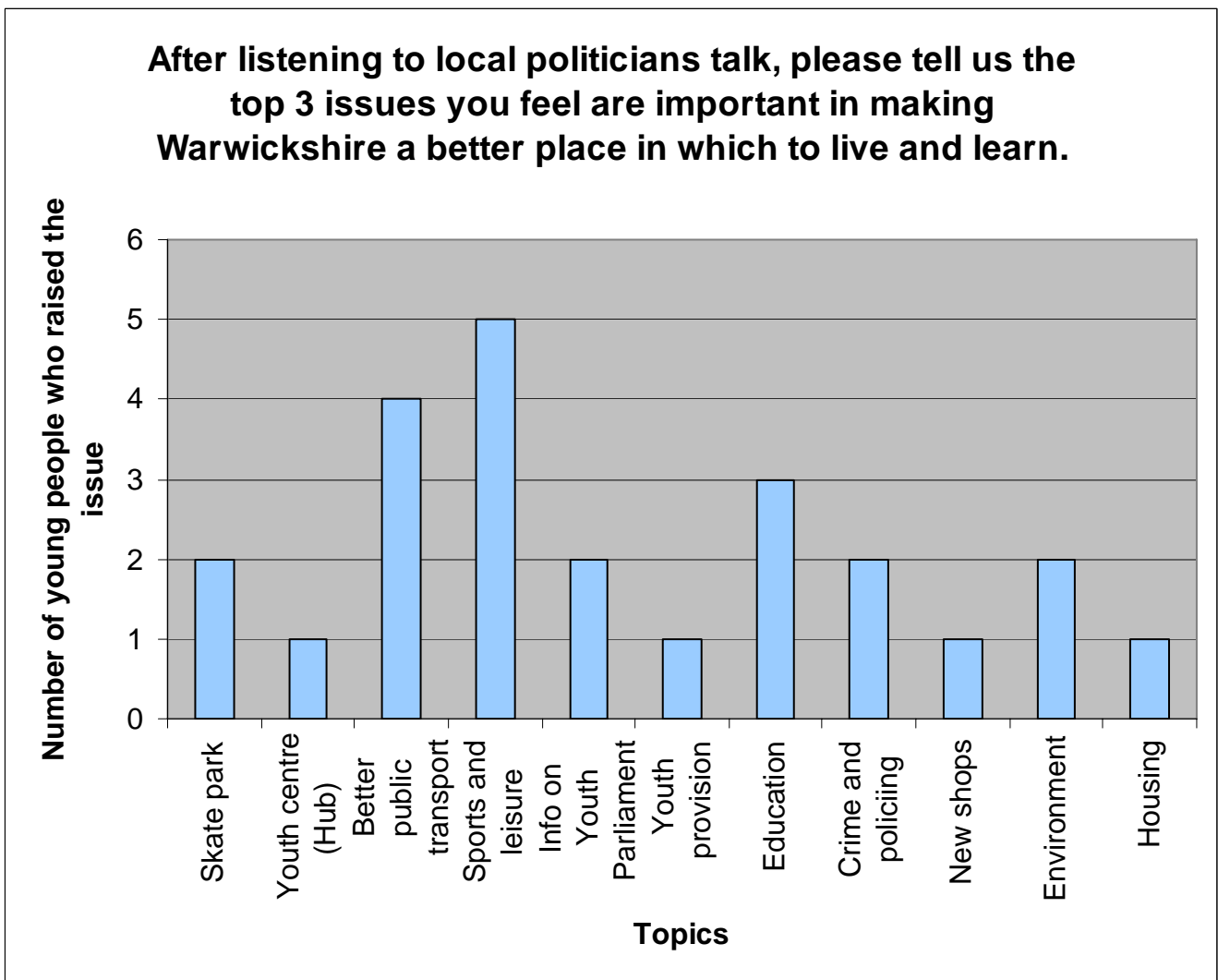
Question 6



Question 7



Question 8



Comments:

Teachers make the best politicians.

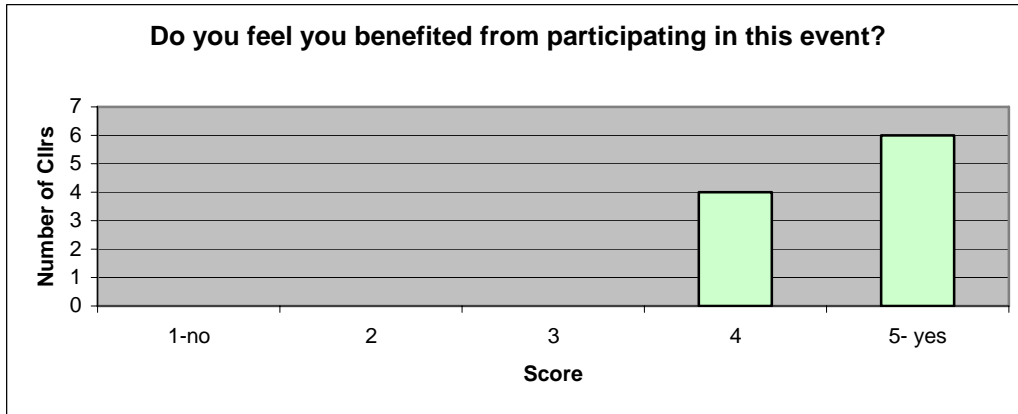
We need to bring the villages in as part of the county.

We need to make sure young people are able to talk about their views and are educated in politics.

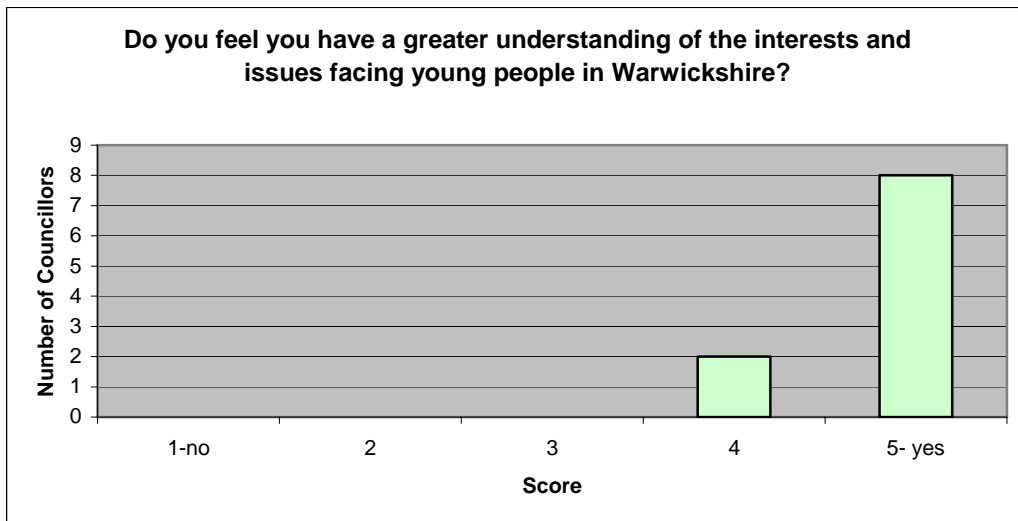
I found it very interesting and jumped at the chance to talk to councillors as I don't feel young people have a say. I would love to be involved in a youth council and see councillors in schools and youth centres talking to young people about politics and making sure when they can vote they can make a decision who to vote for and do vote, we are in the minority being able to elect our leaders and should make the most of it.

Stratford-on-Avon Political speed Dating – Councillor Feedback

Question 1



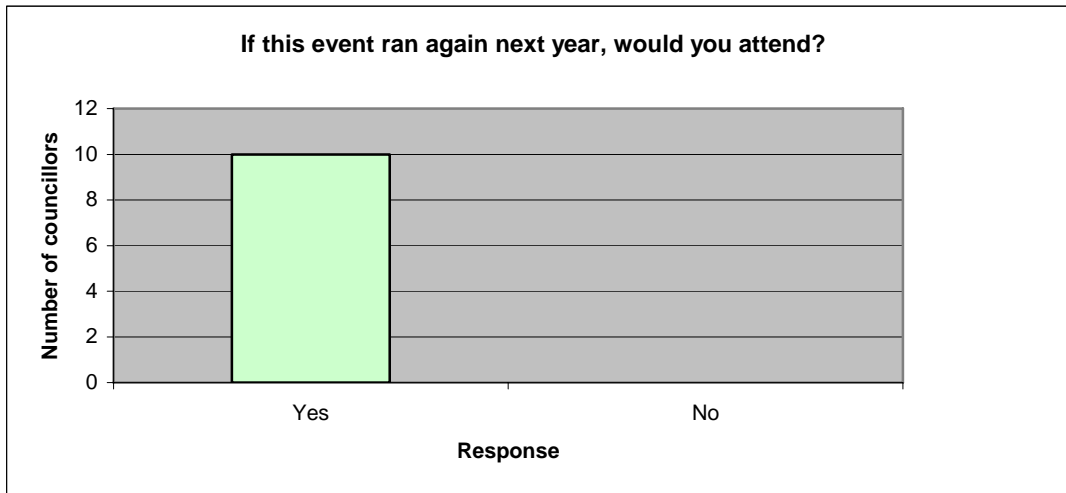
Question 2



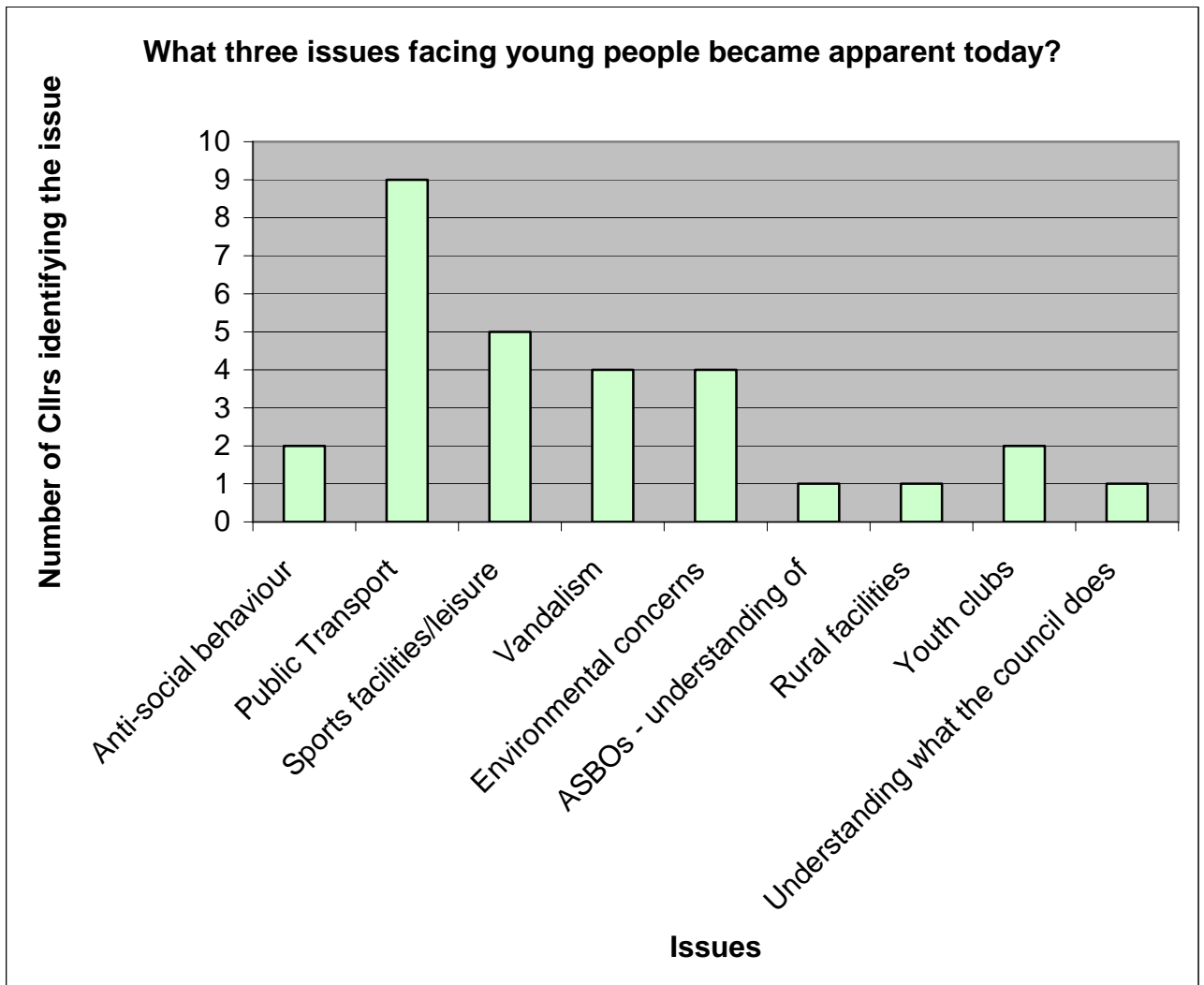
Question 3



Question 4



Question 5



Comments

Really original idea, and you should do it again soon

I think an older student would benefit more than the age groups today

Great opportunity to meet such a group of bright, intelligent youngsters who have genuine concern for their communities

These kids have different problems and aspirations depending on where they live.

Rural and urban problems (fear of crime)

They need to feel valued and we need to respond to their needs, but they need to understand the financial restrictions.

Request from some young people to go into school to give talks on local government

Three minutes went very quickly - perhaps more time, less changes

We should do this at least twice a year in different parts of the district in the evening.

Briefing? Local meetings?

A few more women (councillors and students) would have been good!

Students don't seem to be getting much out of their citizenship lessons.

3 minutes is too short