

Children's Services

Guidance for the Youth Voice WhatsApp Group

1. Purpose

Dorset Youth Voice Chat is a WhatsApp Chat Group that enables young adults to voice their opinions to the council, so we can work accordingly to make positive change. It has been requested by young people who are members of Youth Voice. It is a private group with a moderator who will have oversight of membership and content. The Youth Voice Team hope to have young people in the group who volunteer to mentor others by leading by example, encouraging others to join and relaying key issues back to the council.

2. Background

The importance of the chat is to allow the young adults to feel that their opinions are being heard and to see change in something they have suggested. Young people want to keep in touch and share ideas using platforms that are familiar to them. This will help the council to ensure that its services develop in accordance with the wishes of those using them.

3. Membership

Membership of the chat is open to young people aged 11 - 24 years of age. For those aged under 18, parental consent must be given. Membership invitations may only be made with the approval of the Youth Voice Manager, who will be a member of the chat.

4. Keeping personal data safe

Young people joining the chat will be sent a link to the chat Privacy Notice, which will set out how their data, including their contributions to the chat, will be used. It will be made clear to them that

- Their data will be controlled by Dorset Council and processed by WhatsApp
- Any contribution they make to the chat will be seen by Dorset Council employees
- Any contribution they make to the chat may be used in feedback reports, although their names will only be used with their consent
- Any contribution they make that suggests that they or another young person (or an adult with social care needs) is at risk of harm will be referred for safeguarding support (with their consent if possible)

5. Leadership

- 5.1 There will be two leadership roles for the chat, moderators and mentors. Moderators of each different WhatsApp group will include the Youth Voice Manager and a Youth Voice Officer; they will be the admins of the group enabling them to control who enters the group. They will also be able to remove inappropriate content or exclude members who do not observe the agreed behaviours (see below).
- 5.2 Because the moderators will not be able to access the group outside of work hours, we propose that the chat has access times. Group members will be asked to post only during these access times.
- 5.3 A mentor is a member of the chat who guides other members into appropriate behaviours and relays the views of chat members back to the moderators. The Youth Voice Team will promote that mentoring roles are shared amongst group members, with an ideal rotation of this taking place monthly.
- 5.4 The mentor should provide guidance, motivation, support, and role modelling. A mentor may help with setting goals, developing contacts, and identifying resources. They will not tell you what to do. You should expect a mentoring relationship based on trust, confidentiality, mutual respect and sensitivity.
- 5.5 This mentoring opportunity for young adults also gives them the opportunity to work closely with the council and feel like a valued member. It encourages them to voice their opinions and those of others. In this way, all chat members will develop their leadership skills.
- 5.6 Mentors will not be able to remove or add people to the chat, or to view the personal data of chat members; this will reduce the risk of the general public being added to the chat and of personal information being shared.

6. Selection of Mentors

- 6.1 A questionnaire will be sent to Youth Voice group members on a regular basis. It will ask whether they would be interested in joining the chat and in the mentor role. Young people will need to have been members of the chat for at least three months before they are considered for the mentor role.
- 6.2 Young people applying for the mentor role will sign a Mentor Conduct Agreement before commencing their induction; the Agreement will require them to observe any directions given by the Manager or Moderators, to follow the Agreed Behaviours (see next section) and to take the appropriate steps if they are concerned that a young person is at risk of harm.

7. Agreed Behaviours

- 7.1 All chat members and mentors will be expected to observe Dorset Council's agreed behaviours:
 - Recognition

- Respect
- Responsibility
- Collaboration

7.2 Where a member does not observe one or more of these behaviours a mentor or moderator will discuss this with them and ask them to observe the behaviours in future. If they do not do so, the moderator will discuss with the Youth Voice Manager whether the member should be removed from the chat.

7.3 Where a mentor does not observe one or more of these behaviours, the moderators will discuss this with them and may also ask them to come off the mentor rota for a period of up to 3 months. Where the mentor continues in breach of the behaviours, they may be removed from their mentor role, or from membership of the chat, by the moderator with the agreement of the Youth Voice Manager.

7.4 We want young people to share their thoughts and experiences in the chat. Moderators and mentors will be alert to content that suggests that a young person is in distress or is sharing sensitive information that should not be shared on social media. They will also be alert to any potential grooming activity. In all such cases, mentors should alert the moderators immediately, and they will take the necessary steps to support and/or protect young people. These may include safeguarding measures.

8. Safeguarding Children and Young People

8.1 All members of the chat will be given information about keeping themselves and others safe from abuse. This will include support available from a range of organisations to those who have experienced or are at risk of abuse, as well as the steps that must be followed when a young person is at risk of significant harm.

8.2 Mentors will also complete Dorset Council's online Introduction to Child Safeguarding module.

8.3 Where a young person has joined the chat with parental consent, the parent(s) will also be given information about responding to concerns about safety within the chat.

8.4 Where any member of the chat believes that a young person is at risk of immediate harm, they should call the police. The police are the first point of contact for all cases of immediate risk to children and young people and will assist the young person at risk and support the person making the call.

8.5 If a member of the chat is uncertain whether a young person is at risk, or believes they are at risk but not immediately, they should contact the Children's Advice and Duty Team (ChAD) for advice. ChAD offers an out of hours service.

8.6 The Youth Voice Manager will ensure that the chat stores 'starred numbers' for the police and ChAD so that young people using the chat have access to these numbers at all times.

8.7 Where a young person who is a chat member contacts the police or ChAD to report or discuss a safeguarding matter, they should advise a mentor or the Youth Voice Team Manager as soon as possible, in order that they can be offered support and the opportunity to debrief.

9. Availability of Group

Chat members will be requested not to post after 8pm. If a member does post after this time, the moderators will remind them of the access times.

10. Feedback from young people – ideas for Dorset Council

10.1 The chat will act as a social media hub for young people to exchange views about Dorset Council's services, resources and plans. Moderators and mentors will work together to plan some discussion items, but members will also be encouraged to suggest their own themes.

10.2 Social media offers the prospect of real time feedback. However, council officers should be aware that such feedback can be superficial and even misleading. Genuine engagement requires planning and realistic timelines.

10.3 The moderators and mentors will together develop a range of feedback mechanisms. These could include chat transcripts, questionnaire results and video posts to the chat.

11. Reporting

11.1 Each month the mentors, moderators and Youth Voice manager will compile a feedback report. This will highlight key contributions made to the chat. It will be shared with Youth Voice members and with Children's Services managers.

11.2 The mentors and moderators will regularly seek feedback on the quality and effectiveness of the chat from its members. This feedback will be included in the monthly reports.

11.3 Should there be any exceptions (for example, removal of chat members, safeguarding concerns) these will be reported to Children's Services managers only, on a confidential basis.

12. Review

The chat group and this guidance will be reviewed in October 2022, and annually thereafter. The review report will be shared with Youth Voice members and Children's Services managers.