

Youth Question Time  
18 October 2006  
Feedback



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## Introduction

Youth Question Time takes place in the autumn term during Local Democracy Week. This year Local Democracy Week has been expanded into a year-round campaign to increase young people's awareness of their power to shape their community. We will be looking to run other activities with schools and youth organisations during the year as part of this campaign.

The aim of Local Democracy Week is to make councils more relevant and useful to young people by encouraging them to 'Take Part Take Power'. The campaign also seeks to get young people to see councils as a route to shape change in their community.

Camden's Youth Question Time is an opportunity for young people to:

- Engage with the local councillors
- Discuss and debate topical issues with councillors
- Participate in lively debate and have their opinions heard
- Listen to viewpoints from students from other schools and youth organisations in the borough.

This year the event was facilitated by Emily Beardsmore, Trustee, British Youth Council and Ifteker Boksh, Camden's Deputy UK Youth Parliament member.

The Panel comprised:



**Councillor Abdul Hai**  
Labour Party  
Kings Cross Ward



**Councillor Andrew Mennear**  
Conservative Party  
Frognaal & Fitzjohns Ward



**Councillor Adrian Oliver**  
Green Party  
Highgate Ward



**Councillor Ben Rawlings**  
Liberal Democratic Party  
Executive Member  
Community Safety



## Introduction

The Mayor, Councillor Jill Fraser, welcomed everyone to the fourth Camden Youth Question time event .

The event was facilitated by Emily Beardsmore from the British Youth Council and the Panel were Councillor Ben Rawlings (Liberal Democrat and Executive member for Community Safety), Councillor Andrew Mennear (Conservative and Executive member for Schools), Councillor Abdul Hai (Labour) and Councillor Adrian Oliver (Green). The Panel members introduced themselves and explained how they had got into politics and why it mattered to them.

The Camden representative and deputy on the UK Youth Parliament, Oliver Bishop and Ifteker Boksh also helped with the facilitation.

The following schools attended:-

South Camden Community School; La Sainte Union; Acland Burghley; and Haverstock. Young people from New Horizon Youth project also attended. A total of 81 students attended.

## Issues Raised

### **Wearing of the veil**

The strong view from all the students was that this was not seen as an issue by them and viewed the veil as no different from other headwear. The current debate was leading to scapegoating of Muslims and the Islamic community. It was seen as Jack Straw's problem if he found it difficult to hold a conversation with a woman in a veil. Other students felt that this was a small issue compared with the Iraq war and famine in Sudan. One student felt that this raised similar issues to people complaining about hoodies.

From the Panel, Councillor Oliver felt that this was a difficult issue and not helpful for Jack Straw to have raised at the present time, also as this did serve as a distraction from concerns at the Iraq war. Councillor Hai completely disagreed with Jack Straw's views and stressed the need for engagement and debate with all in our multi cultural society. He pointed out that we communicate in a number of different ways and what we wear is not a barrier to communication. Councillor Rawlings stated that the key was how to stay a better multi cultural society while allowing particular groups to keep their identities. The debate needed to take place, but it should be for the Muslim community to have and the way in which the issue had been raised was unhelpful. He felt that stifling of debate would put freedom of speech at risk and play into the hands of extremist parties such as the British National Party. Councillor Mennear agreed with the importance of defeating extremism through debate and hoped the issues for any community could be debated openly. For this reason, he supported Jack Straw raising the issue, and stressed that what was being debated was the wearing of the full veil, rather than covering one part of the head.

Other students referred to the case of a worker for British Airways who had been made to remove a necklace with a cross. It was felt that in a free society people should have the choice as to how they dressed.

On the issue of hoodies, Councillor Hai pointed out that there was a difference as this was not a matter of religious beliefs. Councillor Rawlings stated that a debate was needed with people who felt intimidated to ask them why they felt this was a problem and to see things from young peoples' point of view.

The strong view of many students were that feelings about hoodies made many young people feel second class citizens.

The question was raised of photographs for passports and driving licences, and the view was that people found no problem with complying with the law for these identity purposes which were clearly seen as for a specific reason.

### **Young homeless people**

Young people from New Horizons Youth project asked why young homeless people had to hit rock bottom before anything was done for them.

Councillor Hai stated that he understood their frustrations but Camden had a high shortage of affordable housing. Councillor Rawlings agreed that the main problem was money and also the requirement from central government for councils to meet targets, which diverted resources. Councillor Oliver felt that a fairer society was needed to move resources to those in need and for youth services. Councillor Mennear referred to the work Camden was doing in bringing children in care back to local schools and having policies for more affordable housing in new developments.

Students felt that money was wasted by adverts on buses and young people should be asked for their views on how money should be spent. Councillor Rawlings explained that money came in different pots for particular activities and had to be used for these, such as bus advertising.

### **Staying away from drugs and more facilities for young people.**

This was raised by students from La Sainte Union.

Councillor Hai referred to the problems around Kings Cross and the need to make young people much more aware and involved in reaching solutions to eradicate drugs. Councillor Oliver referred to the power of the drugs companies and the arguments for legalising use. Councillor Mennear stated that Camden Town was well known as a place to get drugs and police action just displaced the problems to surrounding estates. Getting resources into the right areas of the Borough was therefore sometimes difficult as the problem moved around.

South Camden contributors said that people were always tempted to use drugs, and there was a need for things to do that could make them enthusiastic and part of society. La Sainte Union felt that youth clubs only worked for a while for some young people and many young people on drugs were excluded from school and would not be interested. It was wrong to punish parents as it was young people's choice.

Councillor Hai stated that the Government had given Camden £ 240,000 for a Youth Opportunity fund, and applications had to be in by the end of October. He accepted there was a need to engage with young people who used drugs and suggested interactive websites and regular sessions for drug users.

South Camden students felt that children excluded from school had nowhere to go. A New Horizon student said that she had been excluded and taken drugs but had still got to college. Councillor Mennear said that the Council did try to get excluded pupils back into education as soon as possible.

Councillor Rawlings stated that the key was to involve young people and the Council was looking at setting up a Youth Council in Camden to do this and decide where money for youth facilities should go. He stressed that young people would not just be consulted, but would be running projects. Some

young people would not want to go youth clubs and there was a need to find out what were their needs. Every young person had something to offer and the key was to get there before they hit rock bottom

### **Global Warming**

This was raised by students from Acland Burghley . There was a strong feeling that the Government should be showing urgency and doing more and spending more money on environmental solutions rather than on arms and replacing the Trident nuclear missiles. More people needed to be encouraged to recycle. A La Sainte Union student felt that people in power now were not concerned as they would not be around when these problems came to a head.

For the panel, Councillor Oliver stated that environmental issues showed the importance of politics, as people needed to choose a party who would act on these issues. Much more money needed to be spent on new technologies. Councillor Rawlings stated that these issues were near the top of the Liberal Democrat's agenda. Councillor Hai referred to Camden's excellent recycling record. Councillor Mennear referred to the problems of getting an agreed solution; for example a lot of UK recycling was going to China; production of biofuels had serious implications for the countryside and would cause emissions from production and transport requirements. He also stressed that young people should be suspicious of political parties agreeing on issues and should ask difficult questions about they really intended to do.

Among proposals suggested were a ban on car use for a year ; carbon use rationing for everyone; and lifestyle changes. If a ban on car usage was unrealistic, then more electric and alternative fuel cars should be developed.

At local level , it was pointed out that the Mayor of London had introduced the congestion charge; cycling was encouraged in London. Councillor Rawlings also stressed Camden's good recycling record and referred to Camden's Sustainability Task Force. He felt that young people were best at recycling and should tell their parents what they should be doing.

Councillor Mennear felt that some big projects may be needed , like dams and nuclear power. Although the nuclear option was controversial, at present the UK got 20% of its energy from this source, and a debate was needed. Decisions were needed now to get major changes in place for 20 to 30 years time Councillor Hai considered that all use of nuclear materials should be restricted and the G8 countries should come up with alternatives.

### **Voting at the end of the session**

#### **Who runs Camden Council?**

One of the lunchtime stalls had asked students to identify who runs the Council. The results were :-

You as a Council resident	- 27
Councillor Keith Moffitt (Leader of the Council)	- 10
The Mayor	- 9
Moira Gibb ( Council Chief Executive)	- 4
Tony Blair	- 3
London Mayor Ken Livingstone	- 1

#### **What were the most important issues raised?**

A vote was taken as follows :-

Environment issues	-30
Homelessness	-15
The wearing of the veil	- 8

Students were asked what other issues they felt were important and said –

- sexual health;
- power of major drugs companies;
- local schools;
- jobs.

#### **Which of the parties would you support?**

Students were asked on the basis of what they had heard today, who would they vote for . The results were a large majority for Labour, with the Green Party next , followed by the Liberal Democrats and then Conservatives.

#### **Thanks for attending**

In closing the event, students were thanked for attending and asked to complete the feedback survey forms and the questionnaire about Camden in 2012,.

Details of the proposed Youth Council would be available soon.

Applications for the Youth Opportunities Fund needed to be with Georgina Edge in Youth and Connexions by 31<sup>st</sup> October.

Finally, students were reminded that elections for the Camden representative and deputy for the UK Youth Parliament would be held soon and schools and youth projects would be encouraged to take part.

## Analysis of Feedback Student Feedback Forms

<b>Feedback form - Youth Question Time 18 October 2006</b>				<b>Total No of returned forms</b>
		%		66
<b>Were you able to ask the politicians a question?</b>				
Yes	27	42%		
No	21	33%	<b>Total</b>	
Did not want to ask a question	16	25%		64
<b>What did you think of the responses made by the politicians to the questions asked?</b>				
Good	27	42%		
OK	34	53%	<b>Total</b>	
Poor	3	5%		64
<b>Has your opinion of politicians in general been changed by at all by today's event?</b>				
Yes	34	54%	<b>Total</b>	
No	29	46%		63
<b>If the answer is yes, is your opinion now</b>				
More Favourable	35	83%	<b>Total</b>	
Less Favourable	7	17%		42
<b>What did you think of the day overall?</b>				
Enjoyable	4	8%		
Interesting	30	58%		
Informative	13	25%	<b>Total</b>	
Boring	5	10%		52
<b>Before today how much interest would you say that you took in democracy?</b>				
A lot	22	35%		
A little	35	56%	<b>Total</b>	
None	5	8%		62

<b>Has today encouraged you to take a greater interest in democracy?</b>				
Yes	45	71%	<b>Total</b>	
No	18	29%	63	
<b>Before today, if you could vote in local and national elections would you have voted?</b>				
Yes	42	65%		
No	4	6%		
Sometimes	4	6%	<b>Total</b>	
Not Sure	15	23%	65	
<b>After today's event if you could vote in national elections would you vote</b>				
		%		
Yes	50	77%		
No	2	3%		
Sometimes	4	6%	<b>Total</b>	
Not sure	9	14%	65	
<b>What did you think of the lunch provided?</b>				
Good	27	46%		
OK	27	46%	<b>Total</b>	
Poor	5	8%	59	
(3 people responded to say they were fasting)				
<b>Is there anything you would like us to do differently?</b>				
Yes	18	31%		
No	40	69%	58	

## YOUTH QUESTION TIME – 18<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2006

**Analysis of feedback form Question:** “ Is there anything you would like us to do differently? Their replies have been listed under headings for ease of reference:

**The Debate:** a number of comments related to the format and structure of YQT:

- Invite more people from the streets instead of all schools
- I think this sort of event should be done more often and these discussions should be taken forward instead of ignored so the same issues does not need to be repeated
- Hear more what other people have to say rather than from the adults – they shouldn't have had debate only schools
- Very good – vote Green
- Stuff
- Hear more discussions with youths and councillors stop going on!
- Let youths talk more – more debates between youths
- Vote more on things of interest or different points of view
- Very potential and political
- Make the quiz time longer
- Take the views and points seriously and take action and assure us that you will
- A lot of important questions were answered
- Speak less
- Thank you for your time and feedback
- I think it is very interesting to hear other young people's views
- Thank you
- Very good event – keep it up

**Timing:** students seemed to want more time for the debate:

- Increase hours
- We need more time to cover all things and not spend too much time on a question
- Lesson to be longer
- The answers should be kept short
- Give us more time to talk and debate – many good questions could have been missed out
- Talk about issues that actually affect the Camden youth like schools instead of national issues
- The politician could have talked less
- 

**Theme/Topic:** a number of students commented on what they would like to debate:

- What is Camden doing about providing better 6<sup>th</sup> form colleges, so we do not have to go to other boroughs to get a good education
- Speak less
- I think they should have discussed education systems
- Very good
- I thought it was great and liked hearing the comments others made
- Change the environment and make power saving bulbs
- Important issues that affected Camden directly were not discussed

**Interactivities/voting/stalls:**

- There should be more activities instead of only question time
- It was good – the free stuff

**Food:**

- I was fasting but the food looked good
- The food needs to be a lot better
- Get better food – vegetarians don't eat meat or animals
- Have better food

## YOUTH QUESTION TIME – 18 October 2006

### Interactive Exercise: **Build Your Own Politician**

Young people were asked to think about the qualities that they think are needed to be a good politician. This activity encourages young people to explore ideas about who their representatives are, what they do and what qualities make for a good politician.

This was their response:

- Understand us yungerz!!
- Good sense of humour
- Would hear everyone's say
- Good sense of style
- Emotional
- Listen to the people
- Understands people and doesn't just ignore their views or complaints
- Friendly with the community
- Willing to listen to other people's views
- Serious about green issues and against war and preferably not under the influence of America too much
- Charismatic honest (but not likely)
- Someone who listens to people
- The perfect politician would have my personal skillz
- Would take other people's thoughts into account
- Independent
- Gets on with the young community
- Independent
- Fair
- Good looking
- Fair person and listen to what people want
- Honest
- Good earz
- Good ear
- Honest
- Listens to everyones view
- Young and understanding
- He should care for other people and give free money to us
- Listens to everyone's opinions
- Listens to what the people want
- Be fair
- Can interact with youth

## Responses to Camden Together: Consultation on Camden's community strategy 2007-2012



In total, 29 young people from a range of schools gave us their views on what kind of a place they would like Camden to be like in 2012.

### **Borough of opportunities: Education, jobs, training and skills**

A number of young people made comments under this theme, particularly on how to improve school life and the educative role of schools to wider society. A range of comments are shown below:

“In my opinion schools in Camden should be provided funds to improve the variety of lessons such as cookery and pottery classes. Students should have a wider range of options in their education for trips and more important matters like their GCSE's where I think students should be allowed to take more options. The public in Camden need to be aware of the dangers so they can start making a difference. For instance schools and the public should be made to recycle much more and start thinking about being energy sufficient. Prisoners and the youth should be provided a second chance or at least be given some advice about how to change their future. This allows people to be friendly rather than miserable.”

“[in 2012] Education levels will have a higher standard (eg higher A levels and GCSE results). Also there will be a stricter rule on truancy and people taking days off during the school term.”

“Less violence, make the primary schools more improved, no drugs and no racism, more local mosques in Camden because there aren't too many about.”

*“I would like more free or cheaper universities for those who cannot afford to pay the full price. I would like jobs to pay fairer wages, especially in 3<sup>rd</sup> worlds countries and for men and women to be equal in money and general experiences.”*

*“Skills for life, such as cooking and looking after young children are needed in schools at the moment. However, we almost never have say. In schools, we learn some lessons that most people don’t even enjoy or understand (eg French, Spanish and DP). The types of lessons should be extended so that we could use them for everyday life and for our future options.”*

### **Sustainable Camden: Accommodating growth and protecting the environment**

Young people are clearly concerned about the future of the local environment. A number mentioned more recycling facilities and increasing awareness raising around global warming:

*“I don’t see many things that Camden needs changing, however the Council could try to be more environmentally friendly. To introduce recycle bins and educate the primary schools in Camden on the rising concern of global warming. Also, many people have an issue with Camden policing ie stop and search, however if young people were told of the reasons why this system is undergoing, perhaps many would agree (more groups educating young people basically).”*

*“[in 2012] We will be recycling ... and will contribute to cutting carbon emissions. More cars will run on vegetable oil and more on battery power.”*

*“I would like Camden to be a more interesting, litter free and green environment. I think there should be an even bigger recycling programme and have an incentive for people who would like to recycle in schools.”*

*“Make a law so that it is illegal to drop rubbish or you can get a fine.”*

*“There should be more recycling but better still if you buy a drink in a glass bottle you should be able to take the bottle back to the shop or café and get a partial refund, the bottles would then be directly reused and in refilled with drink. I think there should be more clubs that teach you about ethical, political and environmental issues like ‘the woodcraft folk’. I would like schools to have more access to leisure centres.”*

*“We can take care of the environment by getting everyone involved in a way they enjoy. We all know about recycling, but at the moment we think it is a chore. There should be more recycling bins, people that can tell people info about it and get it heard across the nation.”*

*“A safe and cleaner environment.”*

*“A better clean and safe environment.”*

*But at the same time, young people want their local areas to be developed into places that interest them – places with things to do and a variety of shops, and that are well connected by transport:*

*“In the future I would like to see more useful shops such as more clothes shops and more home equipment stores. Stuff which could help with our lives. Camden could have more clubs and youth centres to get kids off the street and give them something to do.”*

*“I think that Camden in 2012 would benefit from a better integration of its services. I mean that if the schools and transport services and housing services etc were more integrated then I think that the borough as a whole would benefit. It would be very nice to see such co-ordination and social integration in the community.”*

### **Connected Camden: Where people feel at home**

Young people made a range of suggestions about how communities can feel more connected across Camden including more youth facilities. A few people also felt that listening to young people more and showing them more respect would help:

*“I think Camden needs more community spaces, more places where kids can just hang out and not be bothered. Camden needs more trees, more recycling bins and more community projects. We should have fairs and things, events where everyone could just talk to each other. More police would make the area feel safe too.”*

*“[In 2012] Camden is a mixture of cultures. Everyone is proud of it. ....Camden should tell us more things about youth clubs. In conclusion Camden is a great place with people in it.”*

*“I want Camden to be a better place for the community like have more chances or youth clubs and places to pray. But there should be more chances for people to meet.”*

*“I think to make Camden a more friendly place you could have more youth friendly clubs and other youth activities around. There is not enough police men and when there is they are not friendly.”*

*“In schools, Gothic cultures should be taken and considered as a way of living. Fan clubs or more concerts and things to meet new people. I would like to see more Gothic things and more English measures and Gothic cultures being taught and respected.”*

*“People should stand united in their views in their borough Camden. I think that there should be more clubs where people can go instead of hanging around the streets smoking or dealing drugs. More clubs*

*would mean more educational and fun activities that would do its part in keeping gangs and youths off the street.”*

*“More activities for the youth needed.”*

*“I would like more youth activities, involving different cultures. To make Camden a more sociable place.”*

*“I believe that Camden should listen to the youth’s beliefs. We feel disrespected by the bus drivers who believe we are a bunch of hooligans. I believe that I want to feel more respected in society. I want to say something that will help my friends in school.”*

*“Looking bright but won’t happen overnight. We need the community to come together and work toward it so we can make it a bright future.”*

*“Lots of mutual respect needed.”*

### **Camden at the heart of world city: A safe and vibrant place**

There were a lot of comments made about community safety and making Camden drug-free:

*“I would like Camden to be a free zone from drugs – drug activist, gangs etc”*

*“I want Camden to be a crime-free zone with police on the road 24/7. I want more football pitches to play football on, more youth clubs and less of dog exercise areas. I want people to walk the streets of Camden without fear.”*

*“I would like Camden to be free from drugs and other illegal activities eg thieves, criminals etc. Plus more local mosques.”*

*”Killing crime should have stopped because there will be more police officers and visitors just have a good time. In 2012 the good thing is that robbery wouldn’t be able to happen because there’ll be new technology to stop it. Camden could be improved by safety contributions to helping other.”*

*“I think maybe more cameras should be put around the areas of Camden.”*

Some young people wanted to see more sports and leisure facilities for young people by 2012 also:

*“ [In 2012] More youth counselling and advice for youths who are having trouble and more advertisement and encouragement on people getting involved with sports.”*

*“I will like to see more facilities”*

*“Have more youth clubs or playcentres so that people can get to know each other in the borough. I would like to see more variety in Camden, places to go to and things to do i.e. sports centres.”*

*“In 2012 Camden should have the best facilities for the Olympics. The infrastructure must be improved in order to attract more tourists. The tourist attractions should be improved to attract the citizens of the EU and all the other continents. The amount of crime should be reduced, the amount of weapons must be improved. This will make Camden a better place. We already have a good borough, but we need to make it exceptional.”*

### **And finally**

One young person from Acland Burghley succinctly outlined his vision for 2012 across all the community strategy themes, which neatly summarises what his peers have written:

*“A variety of choices for training. Lots of different courses to choose from with really good facilities. A better environment and cleaner streets. Fine people who litter, so litter will become less common. More youth clubs. Build new sports centres etc. make the streets safer by putting in more policemen. Raise awareness about knife crime. Set up different things to bring the community together.”*

