

“Ponteland Question Time”

Took place at the Memorial Hall 23rd Sept

Panel Members

Guy Oppermann MP

Elliot Barker

Cll Peter Jackson

Molly Hall

Cll Carl Rawlings (Ponteland Mayor)

Michael Dwyer

This event was well received with plenty of audience participation by way of questions to the panel. Sarah Parkes from UKyouth and Jon Niblo from Northumberland Clubs for Young People were part of the VIP's present.

Guy Opperman quoted “Ponteland Community Partnership is leading the way by organising such an event” and “the young people stole the show”

An excellent spread of ages attended which gave a good balance for the questions and answers. The youngest participant, aged 10 years of age, asked the panel questions and contributed well to the event. A good humoured event enjoyed by all those who attended.

One question from the floor asked “Where we all the young people?” this was quickly rebuffed by the Leader of the students panel “I could say, where are the older people?”

Question 1 Should we lower the voting age to 16?

Discussion points Should or shouldn't the voting age be lowered?

- Why shouldn't a young person not be able to vote when they can get married at 16, eligible to take the driving test at 17 and be a councillor and vote at 18
- Young people should not be regarded as irresponsible
- Young people are concerned about politics and how decisions affect them and their future.
- Young people do recognise that not all students of 16 yrs of age are interested in politics
- It was felt that politics is an area that should be included in the national curriculum through citizenship-this would put a strain on schools but it could be delivered in an unbiased way
- It was agreed that there needed to be some conformity on the age of responsibility

Question 2 Has University and Further Education become too expensive?

Discussion points Should there be a fairer way of paying fees?

- The burden on parents to assist with funding.

- Should the fees be spread through taxes across the working population? Was that fair?
- Is it right that a student could come out of University owing approx £45K!! Or more?
- The terms and method of repayment were discussed
- Further Education and apprenticeships should be included in this debate
- Should there be any fees? when Scotland does not charge
- It was agreed there was not a right answer

Question 3 Does the gap between the young and old prevent the young having a voice?

Discussion Points Was there a gap?

- Well debated topic
- Ponteland young people are in the minority-that can give them a disadvantage to start with.
- What interests the young is different
- Since being involved with the preparation of this event the students had embarked in some training with the Chairman of the Ponteland Community Partnership to become Democracy Champions (UKyouth). Subsequently the students have set up a Youth Forum to take an active role in influencing both the Ponteland Community Partnership and the Ponteland Neighbourhood Plan. This is ongoing
- This was agreed by all as a very positive step moving forward to young people connecting with the wider population of Ponteland.

This event was seen by Guy Opperman as a first and a very worthwhile event only made possible through a lot of hard work. Special thanks were given to Alma Dunigan Chairman of the Ponteland Community Partnership, Dan Brown from Guy Oppermans Westminster office, the Community Partnership for making it possible and the sponsors Dobson's Estate Agents and Cowells Garden Centre.

The Chairman of the Community Partnership stated "This has been a fantastic event bringing together the students, High school, Ponteland Community Partnership, sponsors and the residents to an event which would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and commitment of all concerned"

At the end of the event a surprise for the students presentation of "Democracy Champion Certificates" were given to the seven young participants from the panel and assistant organisers of the event. Their next challenge is to embark on their Youth Forum and engage with the Community Partnership and the Neighbourhood Plan, Youth Provision subgroup, in the near future.

Congratulations to:

Elliott Barker

Molly Hall

Michael Dwyer

Michael Quigley

Ben Egglestone

Owen Stratford

James Plumeridge

Helina Grozo

Bea Holliday

Ellen Stephenson

George hunter