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**Dear Headteacher,**

We are writing to ask for your support to encourage young people at your school to get involved with Wiltshire Youth Council.

Wiltshire Youth Council gives young people the chance to have their say on decisions that are made by Wiltshire Council. Furthermore our area boards have funding available to allocate to projects for young people, and youth councillors will help to allocate this funding to projects that are important to them and their peers. They will also have the opportunity to inspect council services, ensuring that these represent young people’s best interests.

Since Wiltshire Youth Council was launched last year, they have made a fantastic contribution to how we deliver services and opportunities for children and young people. They have provided valuable input in a wide range of areas including the Wiltshire Healthy Schools programme, the allocation of youth grant funding, mental health services and cost of living advice and support for young people. Wiltshire youth councillors also supported the first ever Wiltshire Youth Pride event and the Youth4Ukraine campaign which raised over £12,000.

In order to make Wiltshire Youth Council as democratic as possible, we would like youth councillors to represent all young people with whom they can communicate with on a regular basis. We would like to align the Wiltshire Youth Council with education providers and so request that all schools who teach 11 – 17-year-olds to hold elections to nominate their youth councillors. Elections will take place between 29/01/2024 and 02/02/2024 and will be held on an electronic voting platform that will easily be accessible to your pupils, using a web link.

Members of Wiltshire Council’s Voice and Participation Service will be able to provide advice and guidance to schools on how to support their pupils to campaign and will also be able to provide campaign packs to young people wishing to stand for youth councillor.

Youth councillors are elected to a one-year term and will be asked to commit as a minimum to one evening a month to attend a full Wiltshire Youth Council meeting which will focus on issues that are important to young people. They will also be asked to talk about the issues discussed at the meeting at school and represent the views of their peers.

Youth councillors can also stand in an internal election to become a Member of Youth Parliament. Youth councillors will also be offered an excellent programme of training to support them in their roles, covering topics such as, debating, running a youth inspection, and delivering presentations.

**Why should your school promote youth councillors?**

By encouraging participation in the Wiltshire Youth Council elections, you will be inspiring your young people to actively engage in discussing relevant issues such as and the environment and safeguarding. We only understand the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures by asking those we seek to protect and the children and young people in our care.

Youth councillors will be part of a supportive forum that encourages debate and reflection, and they will be able to bring their experience and new skills back into school or setting. This will also enable you, as leaders, to engage at a deeper level, with youth voice both within your school and within the wider community and county, and perhaps even wider. It also supports our ethos of ensuring that we listen to our young people and protect them as best we can.

This forum will provide an opportunity to help shape all Wiltshire Council services to ensure they are right for young people in areas including transport, climate change, youth services and education to name just a few.

To sign your school up to this exciting initiative please complete the enclosed form as soon as possible and no later than Friday 17 November. For further information about the scheme please email childandyouthvoice@wiltshire.gov.uk and sign up to an information session – details to follow. We will also be sending on further information to all schools before half term.

Yours sincerely

Laura Mayes and Lucy Townsend

