

**Northumberland  
Children and Young People's  
Participation Strategy  
2017 - 2020**

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### **What is Participation and why is it Important?**

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states "Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."

Within Northumberland the Children and Young People's Strategic Participation Group aims to enable children and young people to have a voice that informs decisions and to be proactively involved in the delivery of those decisions.

*'Young people must be in the driving seat to inform decisions, shape provision, and inspect quality. Young people matter. They are important to us now and to our future and we need them to flourish. A very small minority of young people feel no sense of belonging and as a result do not respect the communities in which they live. The vast majority, however, do make a positive contribution and feel misrepresented and undermined by negative images of, and attitudes towards, young people. We need to work together to create a society that is more positive for youth'. (Positive for Youth, 2012).*

### **Participation Strategy Vision**

*"Participation is a way of working, rather than an event, a project, an unachievable dream or a tick box ...(it is) a culture of participation from top to bottom and side to side."* Shenton, F (2004) 'Everyday Participation: A Practical Guide to Youth Involvement.

This simple sentence holds the key emphasis and vision of this strategy, in that while there will be a number of specific participation activities, these will be to further embed and enhance the ethos of participation throughout the day to day working.

To demonstrate this way of working there is an expectation that:

- Children and young people will be proactively involved in strategic and political decision making to inform policy and delivery
- Service delivery and policy will respond to the views and children and young people and will be based on their views, needs and aspirations
- Children and young people will be proactively involved in the implementation and delivery of the participation strategy.

## **Defining Aims**

In keeping with the ethos of “Participation is a way of working rather than an event...” the following principles define how children and young people’s voices are heard and their opinions influence the decision making process:

1. Promoting positive images of children and young people and their achievements
2. Identify and facilitate effective networks between participation groups
3. Influence financial decision making through a continuum of dialogue
4. Encourage high quality participation work
5. Influence and support workforce development to include participation, knowledge and skills across all partner organisations
6. Continue the development of the Participation framework for 13 - 25 year olds
7. Develop a participation framework for 0-13 year old children
8. Develop appropriate communication channels with young people utilising social media.
9. Ensure a positive communication channel between all participation groups through the strategic participation group.

## **Participation Networks**

A wide range of youth participation takes place throughout Northumberland. Many services, agencies, organisations and schools engage in high level participation activities. Some organisations and schools have achieved national acclaim for their outstanding work in this field. The Children and Young People’s Strategic Participation Group aspires to build on existing good practice and ensure greater cohesion across the work.

The Strategic Participation Group will support the network of participation groups across the county to embed participation as a way of working and to maximise high quality opportunities for children and young people to influence the decisions that impact upon them.

Appendix 1 demonstrates the existing network of participation within Northumberland.

### **Northumberland Children and Young People's Strategic Participation Group**

The Strategic Participation group comprises of representation from Health, Voluntary and Community Sector and Northumberland County Council and is supported by NCC elected Members. The group members include those in strategic posts and others in more operational roles across the sectors, all of whom share a commitment to the participation agenda. The Strategic Participation Group is responsible for the development and monitoring of children and young people's participation within Northumberland and embedding the vision of the group within the working practice of partner organisations, departments and services.

Strategic partners are responsible for ensuring that Participation Strategy priorities are shared at every level throughout their organisations and sectors to influence policy, service planning and financial decision making

Operational partners are 'participation champions' within their service. They implement participation activities and opportunities and advise the group on methodology for engaging with children and young people.

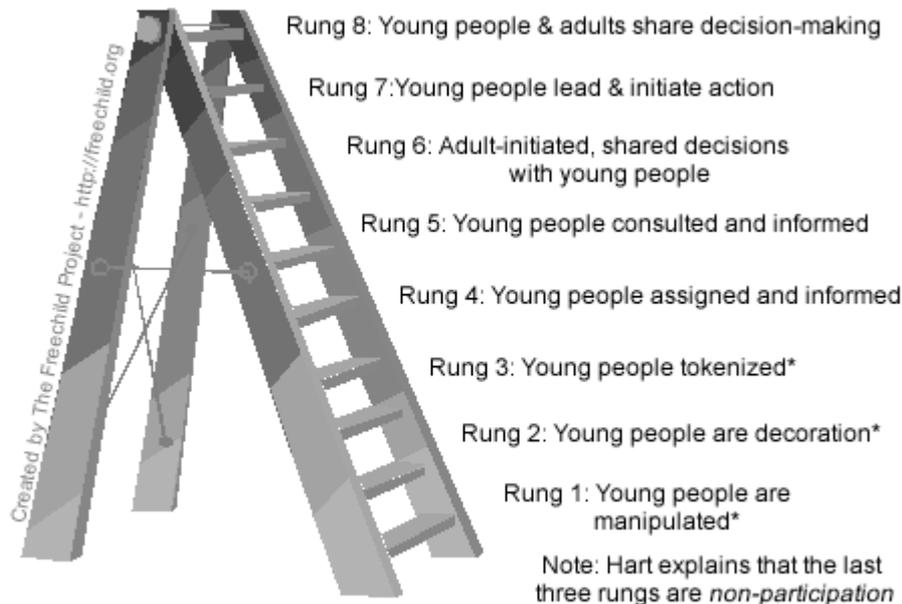
Appendix 3 demonstrates how the use of wide consultation methods can draw out the genuine thoughts and opinions of young people within Northumberland. Appendix 3 is a brief report following the annual Make Your Mark ballot, which is a national ballot of young people to identify the issues that are most important to them. Appendix 3 highlights the responses from young people in Northumberland in 2016.

Appendix 2 demonstrates how the Strategic Participation Group fits into the process of young people influencing decisions and change.

## Participation Standards

For youth participation to be effective and consistent throughout Northumberland it is necessary for every working with children and young people to have a single set of youth participation standards. Highlighting what is and is not considered effective or appropriate participative practice.

## Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



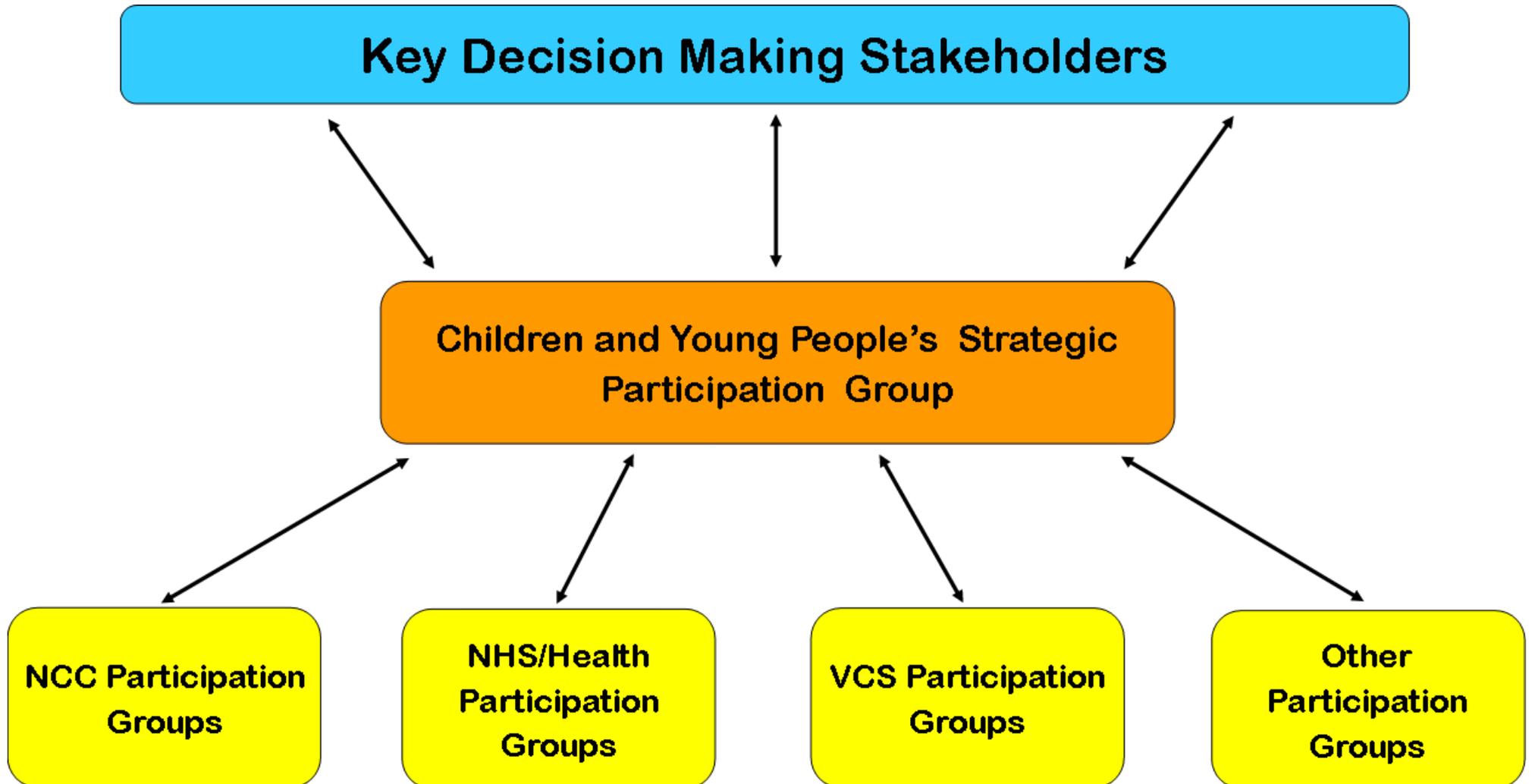
Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation suggests that the lowest three rungs, Tokenism, Decoration and Manipulation are not considered to be participation. Although, it is recognised that some work with young people may well start within these areas but with a plan to move forward to a more participative approach.

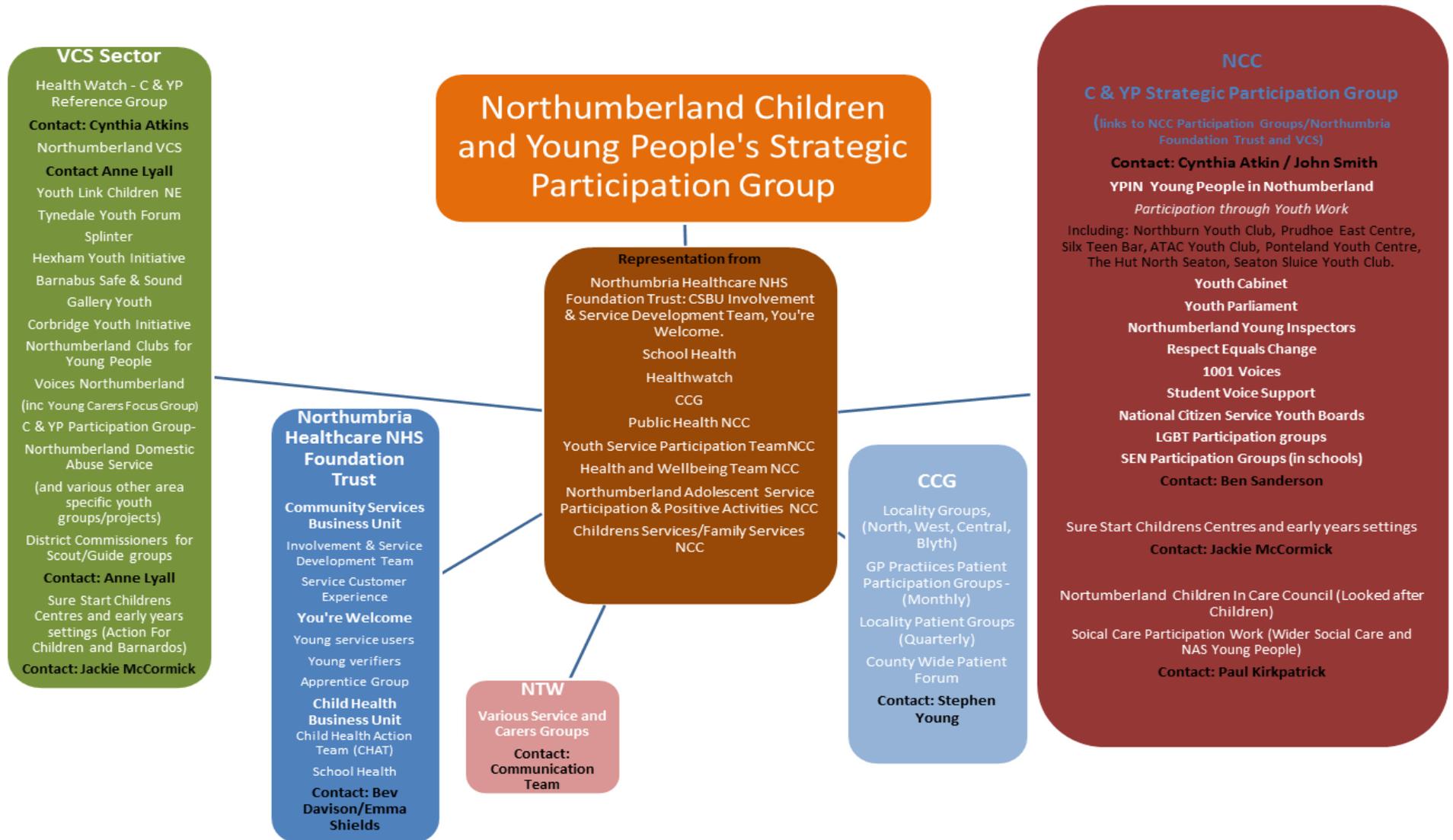
### Core standards:

1. We listen to children and young people and respond appropriately to what they say.
2. We ensure that children and young people's views inform our work.
3. We respond to and support children and young people's individual needs by encouraging them to feel good about themselves and building their confidence.
4. We have a welcoming approach and show children and young people our appreciation of their involvement and contribution towards the development of the service.
5. We are respectful of children and young people's opinions, knowledge and experience.
6. We invest sufficient time to ensure that children and young people can participate in a meaningful way.
7. We ensure that children and young people receive meaningful feedback following their input.

There is an expectation that all organisations and departments that work with children and young people will engage them in a participative process through their way of working and cultural ethos. These core participation standards are a baseline for all participation work with children and young people in Northumberland.



# Network of Youth Participation Across Northumberland



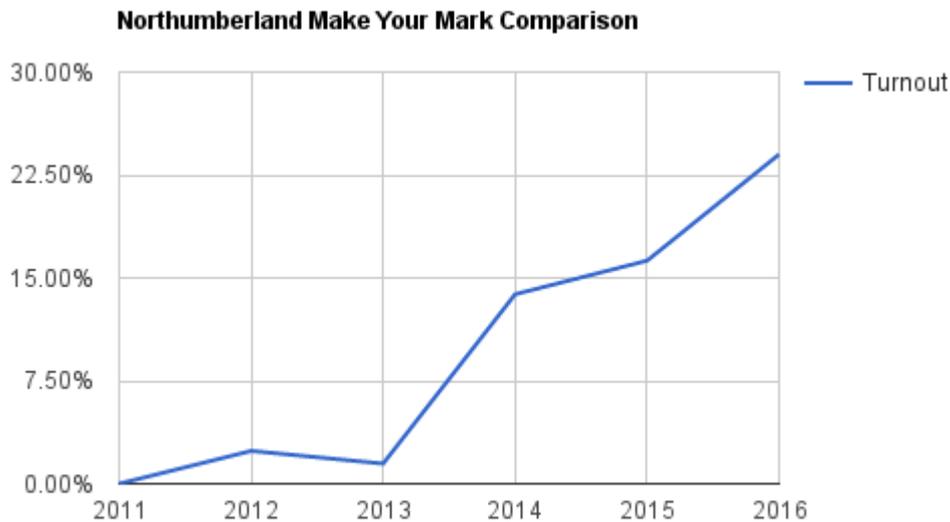
## Appendix 3

### Make Your Mark 2016 Overview of Northumberland's Results

Every year the UK Youth Parliament holds a UK-wide ballot called 'Make Your Mark', where all young people can vote on what they think Members of the Youth Parliament should campaign on for the year ahead.

Within Northumberland the Make Your Mark campaign is organised through the Youth Service Participation Team and the Youth Parliament and Cabinet. In order to make the ballot available to as many young people aged 11-18 as possible within Northumberland the Participation team distributed Make Your Mark ballot papers to all schools wishing to take part, collect them in, count and submit the results to the national campaign.

As can be seen below Northumberland has seen a steady growth over the past few years in the number of young people taking part. In 2016 the total votes cast was 6937, 24% of the total number of young people aged 11-18.



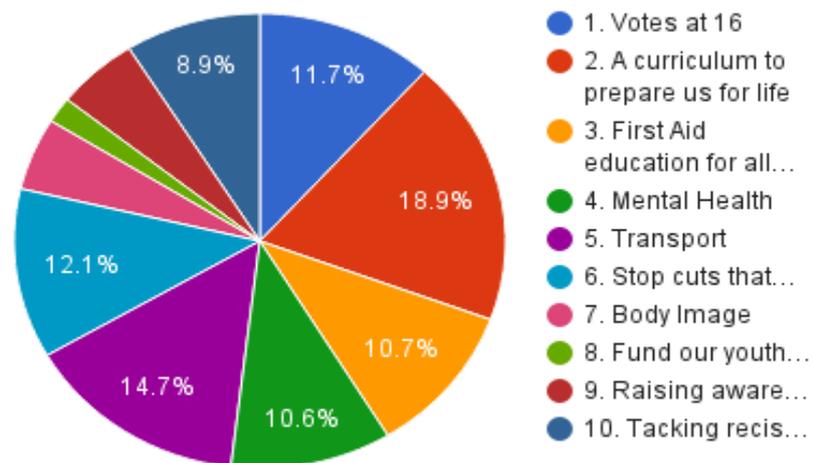
2016 saw the following topics listed on the ballot paper, with the option for each young person to pick the one topic that they feel is most important:

1. Votes at 16
2. A curriculum to prepare us for life
3. First aid education for all young people
4. Mental Health
5. Transport
6. Stop cuts that affect the NHS
7. Body Image
8. Fund our youth services, don't cut them
9. Raising awareness of sexual harassment in schools
10. Tackling racism and religious discrimination

Nationally the results were:

1. A curriculum to prepare us for life
2. Tackling racism and religious discrimination
3. Transport
4. Votes at 16
5. Stop cuts that affect the NHS
6. Mental Health
7. First aid education for all young people
8. Raising awareness of sexual harassment in schools
9. Body image
10. Fund our youth services, don't cut them

### Northumberland Make Your Mark Tally 2016



However, in Northumberland the young people who took part voted as follows:

So how was the Northumberland vote split on a geographic basis?

As has already been explained the majority of votes cast done so within schools, with the exception of those cast by young people taking part in NCS or the Local Democracy Week. So we can use the schools as a geographic marker to highlight the voting pattern. As you might expect Transport figured higher with the more rural schools.

Issue	Totals	Chan-try Mid-dle	NCS	NCEA	BCHS	BCC	Sea-house s Mid-dle	Astle y	QEHS	PCHS	Hex-ham Mid-dle	DCHS	KEVI	Ash-ington High	St BB	Bede	LDW
1. Votes at 16	810	19	8	54	22	58	1	21	131	95	18	121	59	65	30	94	14
2. A curriculum to prepare us for life	1313	42	7	71	49	162	1	50	105	77	9	88	172	128	158	172	22
3. First Aid education for all young people	741	30	10	86	31	54	6	15	79	34	7	81	73	93	46	80	16
4. Mental Health	735	31	5	74	13	71	2	24	119	55	5	122	53	59	29	66	7
5. Transport	1023	17	5	54	32	72	3	64	135	65	7	217	119	72	41	109	11
6. Stop cuts that affect the NHS	837	29	4	89	27	80	0	36	104	48	9	106	68	89	55	88	5
7. Body Image	357	22	4	32	11	31	2	16	56	6	5	36	20	48	20	45	3
8. Fund our youth services, don't cut them	127	4	3	27	2	5	0	4	13	3	0	33	8	9	5	10	1
9. Raising awareness of sexual harrassment in schools	374	20	1	78	8	21	1	6	26	16	2	33	43	50	21	42	6
10. Tacking racism and religious discrimination	620	34	2	70	8	38	2	9	47	19	6	92	45	81	70	81	16
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6937</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>635</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>815</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>929</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>787</b>	<b>101</b>