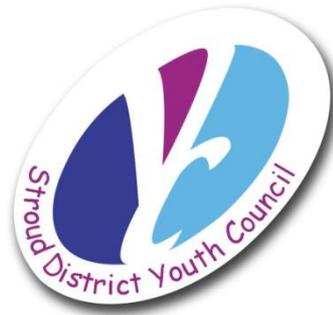


Local Democracy Issues for Young People

A Consultation Project by:



STROUD DISTRICT YOUTH COUNCIL

Presented by:

Charlotte Bignell and George Gooch

Introduction

Aim

'To consult young people in the Stroud district regarding political education, their voice, their understanding and opinion of the political system, and the lowering of the voting age.'

Background

- Participation and Empowerment is integral to SDYC and young people's voice
- Fundamental principals set down in United National Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Needed to consult before supporting the British Youth Council led campaign on lowering the voting age
- Political education and learning about democracy became as big an issue

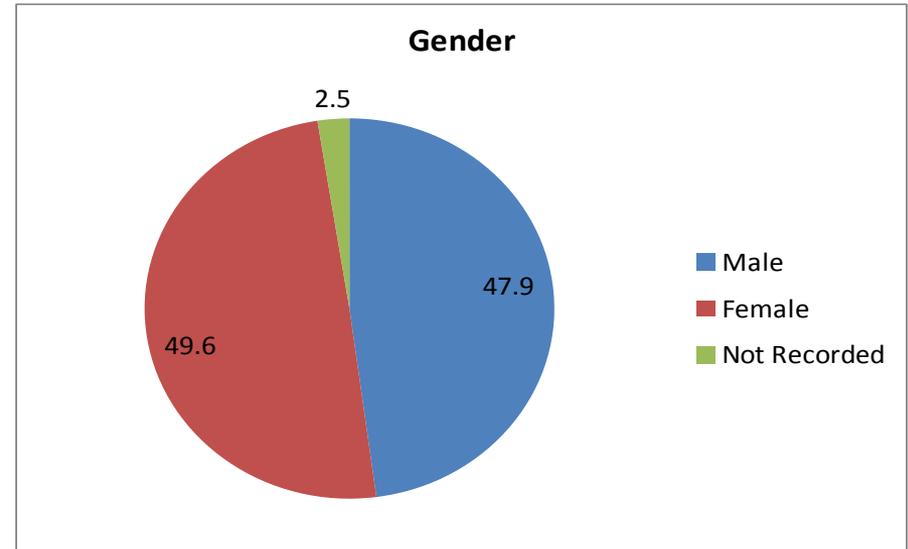
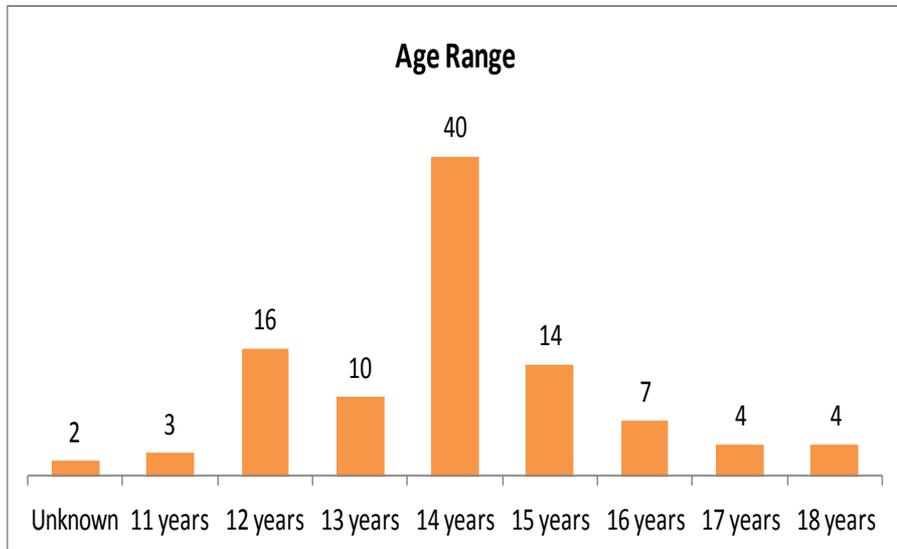
The Results

The electronic survey was sent to 9 secondary schools in the area as well as SGS College (Stroud Campus).

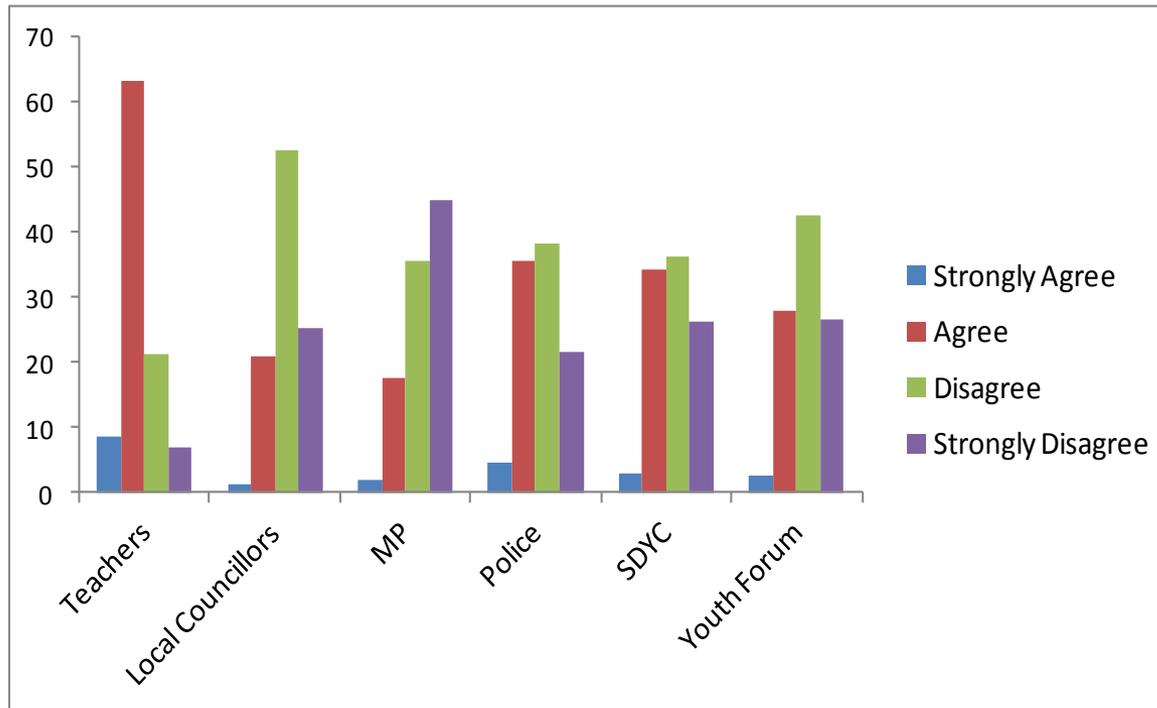
There were **413** respondents across a wide age range: 11 to 18 years, of which;

69% were 11-14 years and 29% were 15 years and older

Gender Balance: 196 – Male 205 - Female



Did the young people feel their voice was heard locally?



- Almost **72%** felt their voice was heard by teachers.
- Over **52%** disagreed that their voice was heard by local councillors and a further **25%** strongly disagreed
- Less than **20%** thought they were heard by their MP

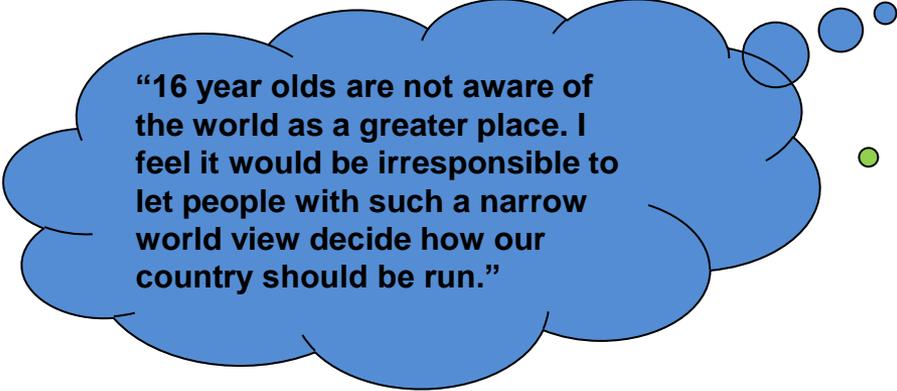
If young people had the vote at 16 years, would they use it?

1	Strongly Agree		37.05%
2	Agree		42.62%
3	Disagree		12.11%
4	Strongly Disagree		8.23%

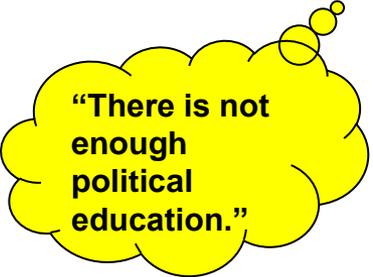
- Almost **80%** of participants agreed they would have used their vote
- **81%** of female participants would use their vote
- **75%** of male participants would use their vote
- **84%** of participants over 16 years would have voted (when they were 16 and 17)
- **80%** of 11 – 15 year old participants would have voted

Some reasons for the young people's responses (for disagreeing or strongly disagreeing)

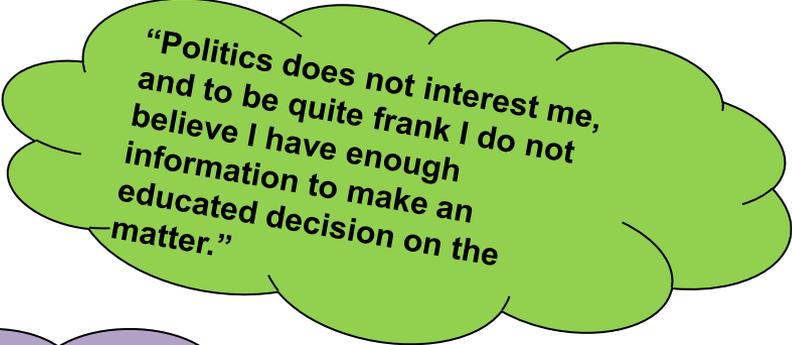
- 15 people felt they did not possess sufficient knowledge/experience to vote
- 12 thought they were too young to vote



"16 year olds are not aware of the world as a greater place. I feel it would be irresponsible to let people with such a narrow world view decide how our country should be run."



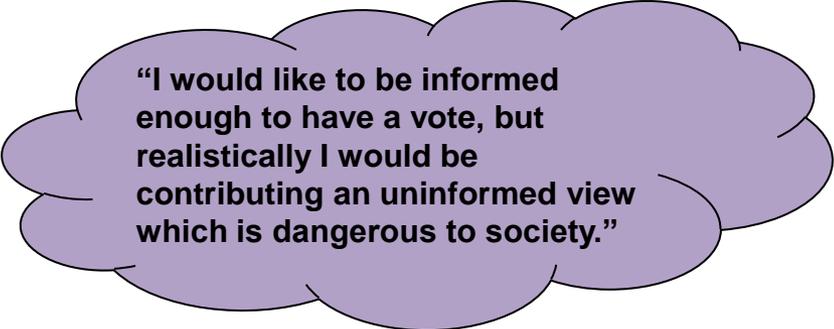
"There is not enough political education."



"Politics does not interest me, and to be quite frank I do not believe I have enough information to make an educated decision on the matter."



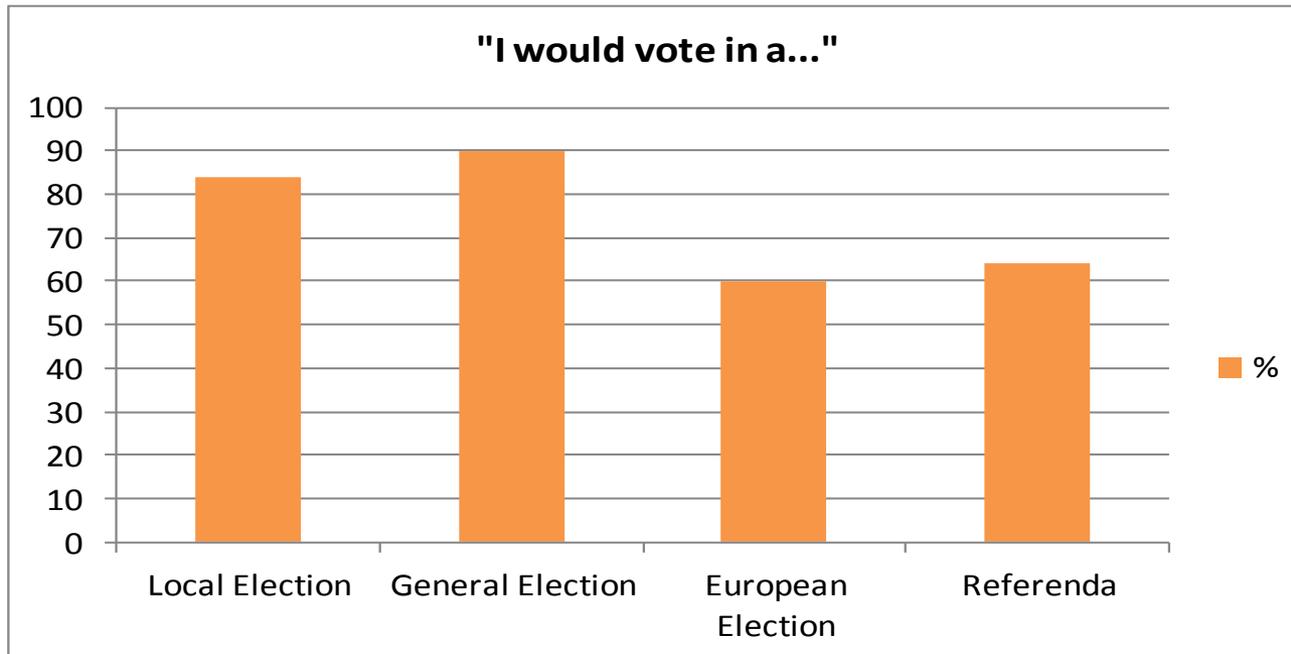
"I would not know who to vote for."



"I would like to be informed enough to have a vote, but realistically I would be contributing an uninformed view which is dangerous to society."

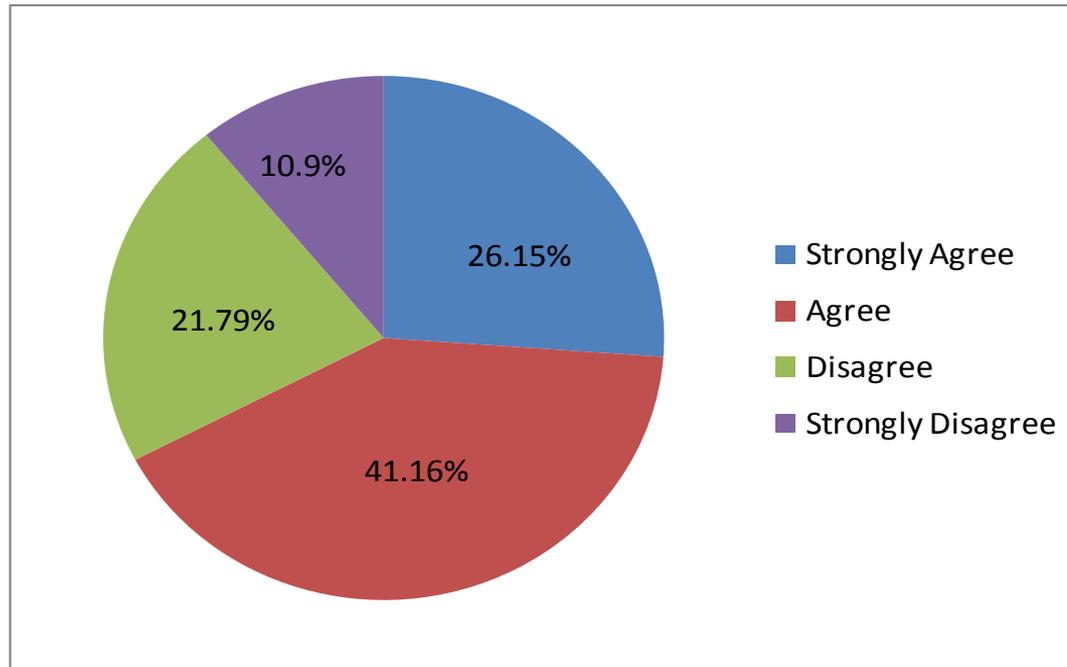
In terms of how their vote would be used:

- Over **80%** would vote in the local elections
- Over **90%** would vote in a General Election
- Almost **two thirds** would vote in a European Election or Referendum

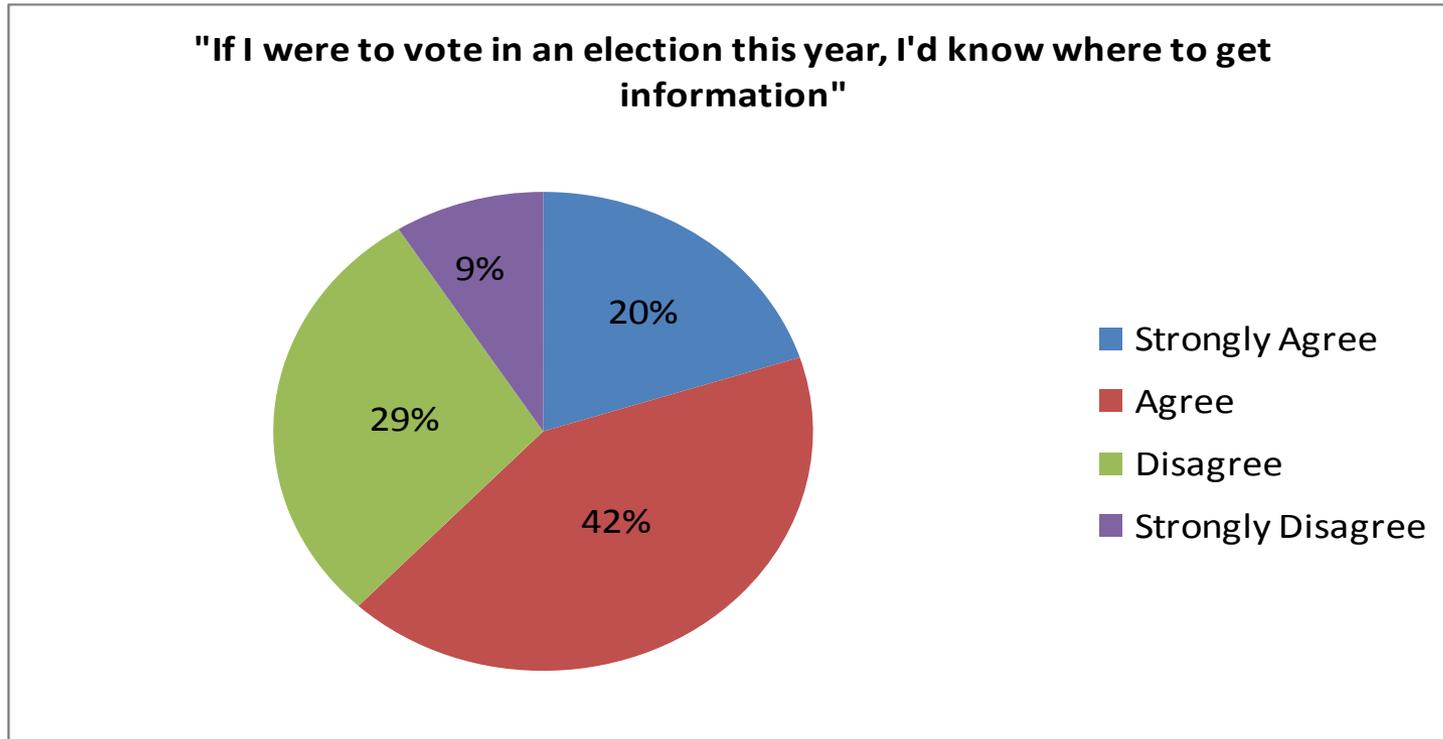


Would participants know who to vote for?

- **67%** agreed or strongly agreed that they would know who to vote for
- Almost **1/3** of participants disagreed that they would know which candidate to vote for

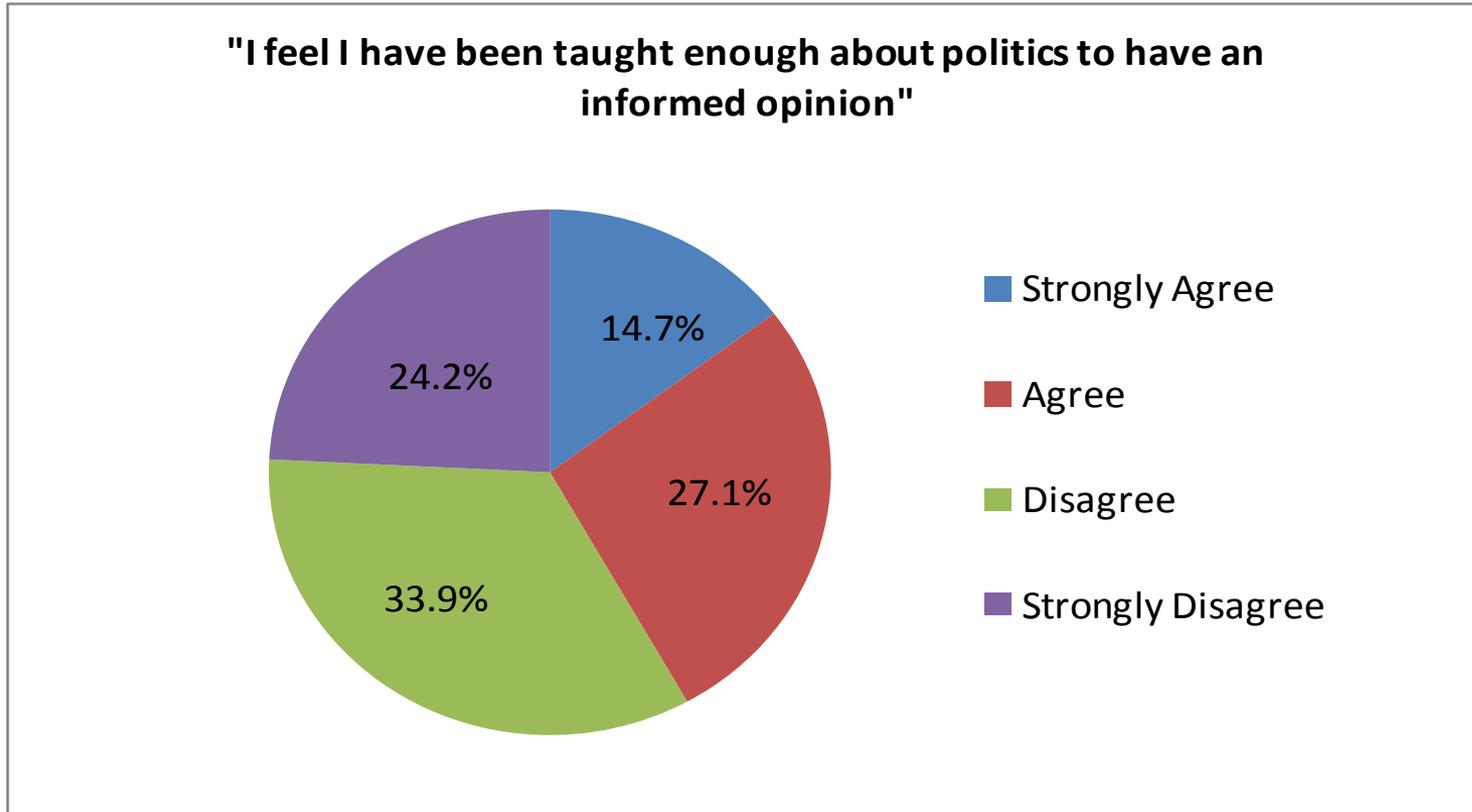


Would participants know where to get information from?



- Only **20%** strongly agreed that they would know where to go for information
- Almost **10%** strongly disagreed that they would know where to get information

Political education and young people making informed decisions



- Almost **60%** of respondents stated they were not taught enough about politics.

Lowering the Voting Age

“I think the voting age should be lowered to 16 year olds.”

- Over **70%** of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that 16 year olds should get the vote.
- Less than **10%** strongly disagreed.
- Almost **5%** gave the reason for their opinion due to the fact ‘Teachers don’t teach about politics.’”

1	Strongly Agree		37.23%
2	Agree		39.71%
3	Disagree		19.13%
4	Strongly Disagree		9.93%

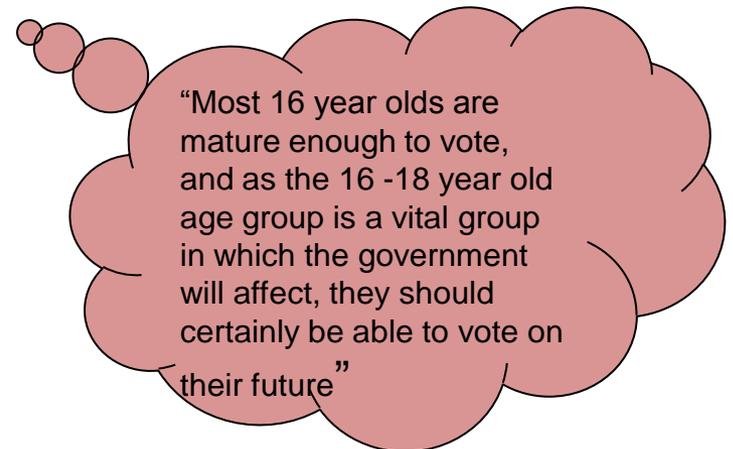
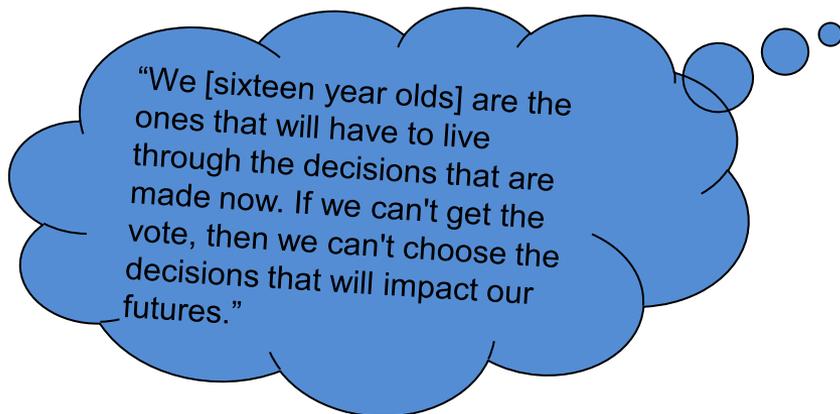
There were over **160** individual comments regarding political education and lowering the voting age to 16 years.

Overview of the comments...

- **78%** of the comments were positive
- **21%** of the comments mentioned the widening of the reach of politics and greater involvement.

For instance, some suggested that the earlier people vote the more chance they will continue to vote. Others commented that greater numbers would add to the political process.

- **17%** of the comments stated that the government's decisions affected young people and so they needed to be part of the discussion.
- **31%** commented on the need for young people to have a voice and become actively engaged in politics.



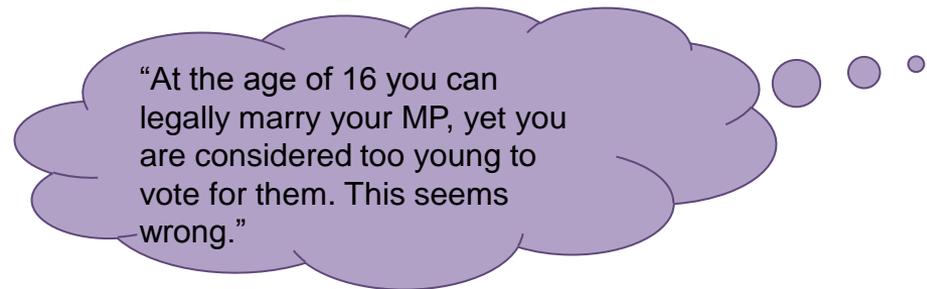
- Over **14%** of the positive comments stated the rights of young people to have a voice and be heard in the decisions that affect them.

- 21%** of the comments that were in favor of lowering the voting age, mentioned the future as being their primary concern.

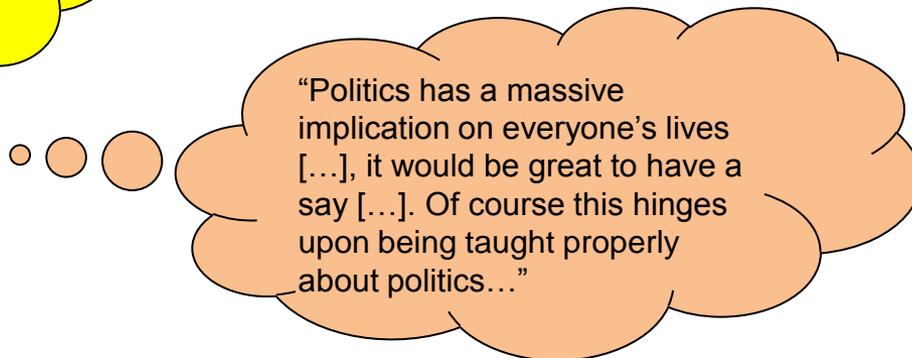
Other comments included the discrepancy between: *being able to smoke; play the lottery; marry; fight for the country; drive;* but not being able to vote.



“Because it gives young peoples voices a chance to be heard.”



“At the age of 16 you can legally marry your MP, yet you are considered too young to vote for them. This seems wrong.”



“Politics has a massive implication on everyone’s lives [...], it would be great to have a say [...]. Of course this hinges upon being taught properly about politics...”

Conclusions

- An overwhelming support for an improvement to political education alongside the lowering of the voting age.
- Many young people would like further opportunity to become engaged in the decision making processes that affect them
- Reaffirms young peoples rights and a desire to impact positively on the future
- The consultation grants a mandate for SDYC to continue to support the BYC in its campaign to reduce the voting age to 16 years.
- The results indicate the need to improve political education in schools and beyond.

Next Steps

- SDYC with representation from schools, college and local youth forums, continue to represent the voice of young people across the Stroud district.
- SDYC will explore setting up an event to raise the political awareness of young people in the district.
- SDYC will formally support the British Youth Council's work around political action, including their Votes at 16 campaign and the Adopt-a-Lord initiative.
- SDYC will engage with local political stakeholders by presenting the report and supporting an open discussion to explore ideas stemming from this project.