

203 - Youth Representatives and Helping the Community: Blaenavon Town Council

Beth Smith

Welcome to the Exchange Podcast. I'm Beth Smith and I'm part of the Good Practice Exchange team here at Audit Wales. As part of our current series on community and town councils in Wales, today we're chatting to Blaenavon Community Council. Blaenavon have the first youth representatives on a community and town council and on this podcast my colleague Sion Owen will be chatting to Boyd and Dan about their experiences as well as discussing the work they've done to bring the community together and raise the profile of the council on social media.

Sion Owen

So, I'm here in Blaenavon Town Council's chamber and I'm here to learn about the youth representatives. Would you like to introduce yourselves please?

Boyd Paynter

So, I'm Boyd Paynter. I'm one of two youth representatives. I've lived in Blaenavon all my life. Yeah, and we were appointed not too long ago. There was two of us appointed in a panel interview process.

Daniel Morse

I'm Daniel Morse. I'm the other youth representative. I've lived in Blaenavon since I was about 12 years old, but very quickly grown to love it. And yeah, I'm very proud to be a youth representative.

Sion Owen

So, what do you do as youth representatives then?

Boyd Paynter

So, a big part of what we do is attending meetings and giving the voices of young people in Benav and making sure that their opinions, their needs, their wants, they're all heard in the council chambers. Because obviously I've always said it's grassroots institutions like this that can make the real differences rather than top down, go from bottom up. So yeah, so it's about making sure that young people do have their voices heard and they're not just overlooked, past on the side, things like that.

Daniel Morse

Essentially, we sit on a non-voting capacity, which means that basically we're just meant to give ulterior perspective because a lot of the time we felt like young voices really couldn't be heard and it was essential to make sure that everybody had a chance to have a say. And it's great that we're here because we get to provide a different look on things, especially when it's a decision that affects lots of people in town like an event and me and Boyd might say, oh well have you thought about adding this or maybe this would work better and that's basically what we're here for really.

Boyd Paynter

A big part of that is like coming back to the, I think it's the UNCRC, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, that's a mouthful. I think it's Article 12 and it's saying how young people should have their voices heard and things like that. So it's really pushing for that article and making sure that you know all these institutions do follow that.

Sion Owen

Okay, so you're observing the meetings and presenting your opinion and helping influence the council to make better decisions in the end then?

Boyd Paynter

Yeah.

Sion Owen

Is there anything specific that I mean undertaking any projects as part of the council as well?

Boyd Paynter

So one of the most recent projects we did was the family quiz night, which was an absolutely fantastic success. You couldn't fault it. was absolutely brilliant. We worked with town council officers to enable to plan, we've worked with local businesses and also local people asking what they would want to see. We did it so you didn't have to register interest, you could just show up at the door because I think with community events it's just easier to do it like that rather than having to go through emails, things like that. You know, we do focus on the young generation, but also taking into account is the older generation gonna want to e-mail and declare their interest? Are they even gonna know how to do that? So I think things like that showing up at the door is brilliant. The event was a fantastic

success. Like I said, we worked with loads of local businesses and things like that.

Daniel Morse

The thing I loved about the event that we managed to orchestrate is that one of the things that I set out when we were applying for the role is that I felt like there was a divide between the older generation and the younger generation. And then that's something that we wanted to include in our event is that I think it should be for everyone, not just, here's a quiz night for the older people or here's a quiz night for young people. We wanted it to be inclusive, so children are allowed. The prizes were fit for everybody. There was free pizza. We really tried to make sure that it could be inclusive as possible to bring the community together.

Boyd Paynter

And we adapted that in the name, didn't we? Like the family?

Daniel Morse

We wanted to push that it's a family event. That was really important to us.

Sion Owen

Yeah. And free pizzas, not to be said.

Boyd Paynter

No, definitely not.

Daniel Morse

Supplied by Munchies as well.

Sion Owen

Yeah. so, and... Someone told me as well that you're doing some work with community transport and things like that as well.

Boyd Paynter

Yes, so that was working in partnership with TVA, which is based in Pontypool and it's looking at how we connect. this is coming back to the older generation, but they find it difficult maybe to get to the doctor's appointment and things like that. So we gave our input in recruiting drivers and things like that because obviously it's all well and good saying yes, let's have a community transport initiative, but it's how you achieve that, it's how you get the drivers and things like that. So we were part of doing that and what we pushed was for more social

media and how you target your approach. So obviously you're going to want to look at probably newly retired people to give up their time to drive people around. So we were looking at how we use social media to gauge your interests and push forward for them to come and join the initiative.

Sion Owen

Yeah, and that then... influences which social media networks and things you use as well.

Boyd Paynter

Yeah, definitely. So you see that divide with things like Instagram and Facebook. You've got a certain clientele, let's say you use Facebook as opposed to Instagram and TikTok and things like that. They're all different people feeding into that one platform and it's how you engage with them.

Daniel Morse

And I think that's, yeah, that's something we really strive for is the We have a Facebook page as Blin Avon Town Council. Before that we were youth representatives, we didn't really have a way to engage with the younger generation. And that's a demographic we also want to look for, the driver's scheme. Because, you know, it's good for older people who have retired to help out other elderly people in the community, but also young people who might need something to do in the summer or got a lot of time in their hands after uni or something. So yeah, so Instagram was something we really wanted to target. So we set up our own Instagram account now. We're Blenavon Youth, where we share all we've been planning, all the events we've done, and updates about Blenavon Town Council. And that's really been successful, we think.

Boyd Paynter

And what I found really interesting is how many people actually view the profile. Because I gave an update to Full Council roughly about a month and a half ago, two months-ish. saying the viewer, the total viewer count on the profile was 164 profile views, so that's 164 different accounts viewing the Instagram account. And then by the time the next council meeting happened, probably about four weeks after, that had shot up to over 1000. And we were like, whoa, where's all them people come from? And what we found is that is impacted by Instagram reels, which they are, they've just took off. We can't, like when you put a post up, we're averaging about between 100 and 200 views per the just posters on. But you put a reel up, that's getting 100 views within a day. And it's just building from there. So we've really tried to adapt. how we communicate as a council with the reels.

So recently we've filmed Councillor Bevan doing a piece of camera about the youth representatives and what we do. We're hoping to post that soon. At different events we do like the family quiz night, we've gone round and filmed and adapted that into a reel to post. So it's just looking at what's successful and pushing for that because obviously we want to get the most engaged.

Sion Owen

Yeah it's all about engagement because I mean it's again it's attention it's getting people to know about the things you're doing isn't it? Yeah so any other projects or anything that you'd like to mention?

Boyd Paynter

We did a VJ Day event a couple of months back and that was really good because what we did we sat pretty much in a stall handing out jammed scones, things like that, just different things. But it was a really good way to interact with the community. And from that we learned, okay, how do we adapt that then to get people attending that event to follow our Instagram account to keep on track with our...

Daniel Morse

I think we ended up saying you can have a scone, but only if you follow the Instagram. I think that was it.

Boyd Paynter

We had a QR code there, didn't we? Yeah. And what we did then, like Dan just said, we printed out a QR code. And that was a good way to adapt then, or sorry, to gain people coming into the account.

Sion Owen

It's a nice way of getting emails and stuff, isn't it? Yeah. but there's a deeper thing that you might be... trading scones for follows. You're also creating connections with the community.

Boyd Paynter

Exactly, yeah, exactly.

Daniel Morse

It's about being there, being in the town, you know, engaging with people, just being active in your community.

Boyd Paynter

And it's putting a face on the name, isn't it? Rather than just hiding behind a social media account, it's putting that face, getting out there, engaging with local people. It builds your reputation, doesn't it? makes people, it makes you visible.

Sion Owen

Yeah, it's very easy to become invisible. So, with all this work and activity in the community, can you see a difference that it's making or has it made?

Boyd Paynter

I think so. I think like I just said about the Instagram engagement, you can see how many people are taking to Instagram now are starting to follow because it started off quite slow and now you can see it really starting to pick up like I just said it's grown from 100 profile views to over 1000. So you can see that and you can also just feel it in the events like the family quiz night you did. You could see how engaged people were, how, and like we said, people were saying to us like, okay, when's the next one? Like, well, we've only just finished this one. Hold on a minute. But no, it's really nice to see. And like, if we're gonna, like we, sorry, if we listen to them, which we plan on doing, we are gonna have future events. And if it's a success, why not? Why not do them? Why stop doing it if it's a success? So you can see that it is benefiting the community in that way. And with the cost of living crisis, you paid the entry fee, but now you get a quiz, you get free pizza, you got free chips, you know, yeah, you got the prizes. So it's different things like that.

Sion Owen

And a nice sign with people in the community.

Boyd Paynter

Exactly, yeah.

Daniel Morse

Well, I honestly, as well, we didn't expect such a good turnout as well. That was quite surprising. It was our first event. We didn't think we'd have such a success as we did, but We're really grateful that the community was as great as they were. They, showed up, they engaged, everyone had a really great time, and they were, begging for more then at the end.

Sion Owen

So, that leads very nicely to the next question of what's next.

Boyd Paynter

Hopefully more quiz nights.

Daniel Morse

Yeah, well, we're hoping for maybe every quarter would be a good step, but hopefully more diverse things in the future. This has been a good stepping stone now. We know we can execute an event. We know how to plan it. We have a sort of budget that we can go off of to make sure that we make an event that's capable, we're able to do it. But that's also cheap and affordable for the town because that's what we also thought as well. We wanted to make sure that everybody can be involved. So I think it was a fiver for every team at 8 people so and that includes the pizza as well so that's something that we want to do for the next event as well I think.

Boyd Paynter

And I think with the election year coming up next year as well it's obviously we've got a fantastic team of councillors but potentially looking at who could come in like younger people like ourselves who could come in give that voice of the young people but actually in a voting capacity. So yeah we're looking at doing like workshops and things like that with young people and just trying to make the council visible to make sure people know that we're here and running little events like that even though they might not bang make a difference like that it's that subtle sort of dropping it in subtly sort of thing that you know the council is available to people coming up to an election this is a fantastic time for young people to get involved.

Sion Owen

And it's also the scale and area that a community and town council can be effective, make a tangible difference, isn't it?

Boyd Paynter

And like I said, like I said, we've got a fantastic team of councillors, but sometimes not having that youth aspect in a voting capacity, like I gave a speech before and I said that The decisions that are being made about our future, the young people's future, aren't being made by those who are going to have to live it. So it's about things like that. And how do young people get involved in that process?

Daniel Morse

Yeah, it's really important to me especially to be involved in a democratic sort of environment that, you know, my say matters. We can't vote, but we can influence people on the council. And that's, it's really important. to both of us that we can be involved and be in the decision making because it means that it's more fair for everybody because young people are often considered that sort of push the back a little bit. But yeah, it's our goal then to bring them forward and bring them in to the core of the council and the core of Glenavon.

Boyd Paynter

I just hope that Us 2 being here now, we're the only ones in Wales. We're the first ever appointed in Wales. So I hope that this scheme does spread out across Wales. I hope that more people get involved. I think it's just such a fantastic opportunity to be able to get involved. I can't emphasise that enough. So I'm hoping that this scheme youth representative spreads out across Wales, across the entire country if we can, but you know, it's stepping stones. Do you know what I mean?

Daniel Morse

I hope we can get the ball rolling.

Boyd Paynter

Yeah, definitely.

Daniel Morse

Other people should have the chance to. to talk in the same capacity as this. I hope that we can provide sort of, get the ball rolling really for other young people to get involved. Like everybody to get involved. Everybody should be invested in their town, be invested in the local community. I think it's important that, it's great that we've been given the opportunity to let that happen.

Boyd Paynter

Definitely.

Sion Owen

And on that note, from the first youth representatives for a community or town council in Wales, thank you very much for talking to us.

Boyd Paynter

Thank you for coming to talk to us.

Daniel Morse

Appreciate it.

Rhian Jones

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