

## ~ Case Study ~

### Local Democracy Week - Meet your Councillor

Just one in three 11-16 year olds have ever met a councillor or MP and research shows that those who do are much more likely to express feelings of political engagement and interest. The Local Democracy Campaign supported by the Local Government Association encourages councils to try to engage young people in local politics with the aim of getting young people more involved with, and aware of, their local council. Each year they promote Local Democracy Week, a week when councils and young people are encouraged to organise all sorts of activities and events to support young people to learn about and get involved in local decision making.

In 2009 Local Democracy Week will take place in the third week of October - from Monday 12 to Sunday 18 2009 and you can get information and ideas for your own campaign from <http://localdemocracy.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageId=1>

Students in 12 schools across Somerset invited councillors to host surgeries at their school during lunch time. This article was written by Laurence Morgan from Somerset, who as part of the County Councils Local Democracy Week, organised this highly successful 'meet your councillor' event in his school for fellow students.



On October 16<sup>th</sup> 2008 County Councillor Ray Tully, who is also known to the school as being a school governor and the owner of the shop, came into Heathfield School to answer questions and ideas from members of the Gifted and Talented group and anyone else interested, as part of the Local Democracy week that took place from 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> of October 2008. I was very excited, as I was organising the event, and nervous, because I was wondering whether anybody would turn up.

My thanks must go to Kim Woodward, who helped me book the rooms, gather the students and provide food for the event, Andrew Harvey, who gave me a list of the Gifted and Talented members, Hannah Lucas, who took the pictures shown in the article for Impact magazine, the students who came ready with their excellent questions, and, of course, Mr Tully himself, who was ready to answer any questions put to him by the students.

The students arrived at the start of lunch, with the free buffet in place, and would have five minute slots with the County Councillor and I in Meeting Room 1. For those who haven't been there, it's the room next to the staff room, which has a nice long table that takes up most of the space. I met Mr Tully in reception and took him to the meeting room, where I was pleasantly surprised to find a group of about 20 outside the door. I took them to the waiting room (E1 – Mrs Barratt, thank you) and called out the name of the first group of people (Note: I say **group** because, as so many people had turned up, I had to fit them into groups of people.)

Some of the topics and questions put to Mr Tully were similar, including new facilities locally, a nicer swimming pool and what young people can do to stay off the streets, but not all were the same. For instance, one of the questions put to him was "How can we/you get young people into politics?" and another was "We would like some vegetarian options in the canteen." Some questions concerned the area in which they were living.

All in all, it was a very successful event. I believed everyone enjoyed themselves and have had some important questions answered. It is essential that kids get to have their say and ask questions, because otherwise, when they grow up they will have no confidence, will not want to speak up and will shy away, which we cannot let happen. My thanks once again go to Mr Ray Tully, and to everyone that helped me organise this event, and remember: **GET INVOLVED!**

