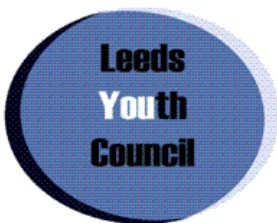
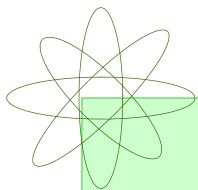




***Protecting  
our  
Environment***  
**Young People's  
Scrutiny Forum  
Inquiry—2008/09**





## *Summary*

We were asked to do a piece of scrutiny work on a topic of our choice and we chose the Environment.

Protecting the environment is something that we all care passionately about, and we know that a lot of other young people feel the same way.

We wanted to make sure that the people who make the decisions in Leeds were aware of the views of young people on this important issue and that they would take action to deal with our concerns.

Because the environment is such a big topic we decided to focus on three areas which we thought were the top priorities. We also tried to choose topics where we could influence decisions and make a difference locally. The areas we decided upon were:

1. Waste Management
2. Environmental Education
3. Sustainability

We also put together a survey to find out what other young people thought about these issues.

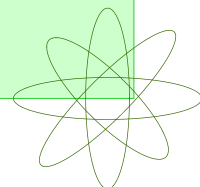
We found out that most young people really do care about the environment and want to increase the action they can take to protect it. For example, 85% of those who filled in our questionnaire agreed with the statement 'Recycling is useful but we need to do it more'. However, there was some confusion about what could be recycled in a household 'green bin'.

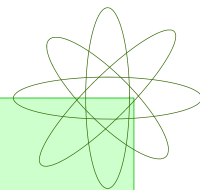
Also, overall young people felt that the Council and Education Leeds needed to do more to set a good example on environmental issues, and that the quality and quantity of environmental education needed to be improved.

We also did quite a bit of research of our own, and asked officers from Leeds City Council and Education Leeds to provide us with information.

We've come up with 11 recommendations for change which cover a whole range of areas, and we're looking forward to seeing how the Council and Education Leeds put these into action over the next year.

The Young People's Scrutiny Forum





## ***Background***

In December 2007 Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) asked the Youth Council to suggest a topic of importance to young people which could be the subject of a scrutiny review undertaken by young people on behalf of the board.

The Youth Council discussed a range of possible topics, and ultimately decided upon 'Protecting our Environment'.

Members of the Youth Council were then asked to volunteer to take part in the Young People's Scrutiny Forum, which would carry out this inquiry.

In order to involve as wide a range of young people as possible, it was decided to follow the example of the last Young People's Scrutiny Forum and invite young people from the participation group ROAR to join the forum. ROAR (Reach Out and Reconnect) is a network of young people that Children Leeds and other organisations work with to help develop services, projects and policy. It includes a wide range of young people, some of whom might not have generally become involved with more 'traditional' methods of participation such as the Youth Council. Members of ROAR made a very valuable contribution to the last Young People's Scrutiny Forum Inquiry - 'Catching the Bus'.

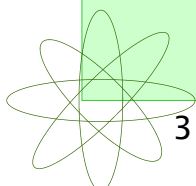
## ***What we did***

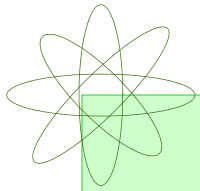
At our first meeting, in February 2008, we decided that the environment was far too large a topic for us to look at everything. Therefore we decided to focus our inquiry on three key areas, where we felt we would be able to influence decision making and make a difference locally. These were:

- \* Waste Management
- \* Environmental Education
- \* Sustainability

We also decided that the aims of our inquiry should be:

- \* To establish ways in which schools and other Leeds City Council services can reduce their impact upon the environment, and encourage them to implement these changes.
- \* To encourage Leeds City Council and Education Leeds to play a part in raising awareness of environmental issues among the people of Leeds.
- \* To ensure the opinions of young people in Leeds, with regard to environmental issues, are heard and acted upon by decision makers.





To support our third aim, we drew up two questionnaires – one to be filled in by individual young people, and one to be sent to school councils and other groups.

We promoted our questionnaires by sending them to schools, putting them on the Leeds Learning Network, putting them on the Council website and sending out a press release. We also asked our own friends and contacts to fill them in.

74 people responded to our questionnaire. Not everyone who responded told us their personal details, but of those who did:

- \* 35% were male and 65% were female
- \* The average age was 15
- \* The postcodes provided showed that they came from across Leeds, with 49% from Inner Leeds (defined as post codes LS1-LS13) and 51% from Outer Leeds (defined as post codes LS14-LS29, BD3, BD11 and WF3)

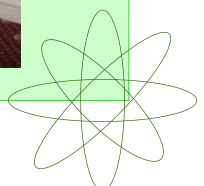
The responses which we got to our questionnaire were really helpful in telling us what young people really thought, and giving us the evidence to back up our own ideas. We would like to thank everyone who took part for their help.

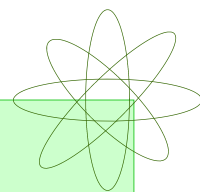
We also needed to do some research to find out what was already being done in Leeds to protect the environment, because we couldn't make recommendations for change without knowing what the current situation was. We put together a range of questions on each of our three topic areas and asked for a written response from officers in the Council and Education Leeds.

Once we'd had chance to discuss their responses (and think of plenty more questions!) we invited all the officers, and some Councillors, to join us at a delegate event, where we discussed the results of our survey and our research.

This is our final report, which shows all of our findings and recommendations.

*Trying to persuade people to fill in our questionnaire...*

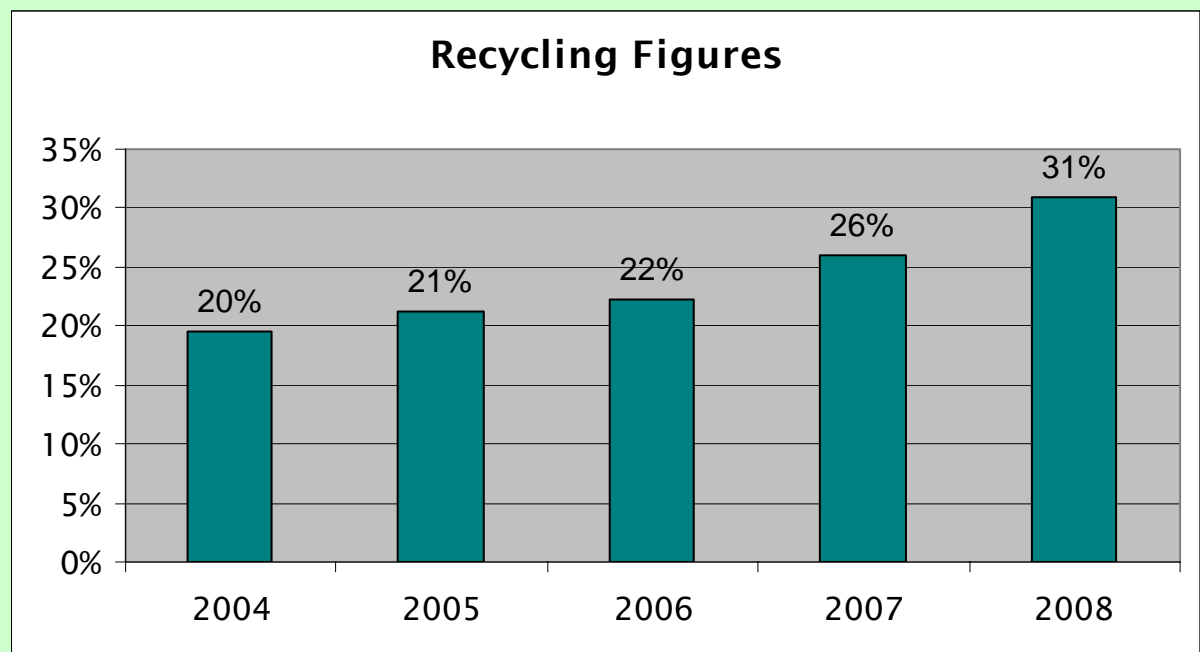




## Waste Management

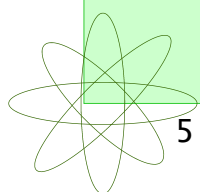
### Recycling targets

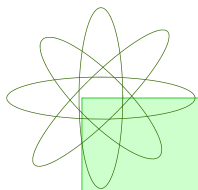
- The first area that we looked at was waste management, and we focused on recycling.
- We found out that at the moment, most of the household waste in Leeds ends up in landfill.
- This is not only bad for the environment, but also bad for the city's budget, because the European Union and the Government are introducing laws to fine Councils for the amount of waste they send to landfill. If Leeds carries on at the current rate, we could face fines of up to **£200 million by 2020!**



- The Council is already taking action to change the way people in Leeds get rid of their waste. Most households in Leeds now have a green bin, and the amount of rubbish that we recycle is increasing rapidly. The graph above shows the progress that the city has made in the last five years alone.

Year	Target
2010	40%
2015	45%
2020	50%

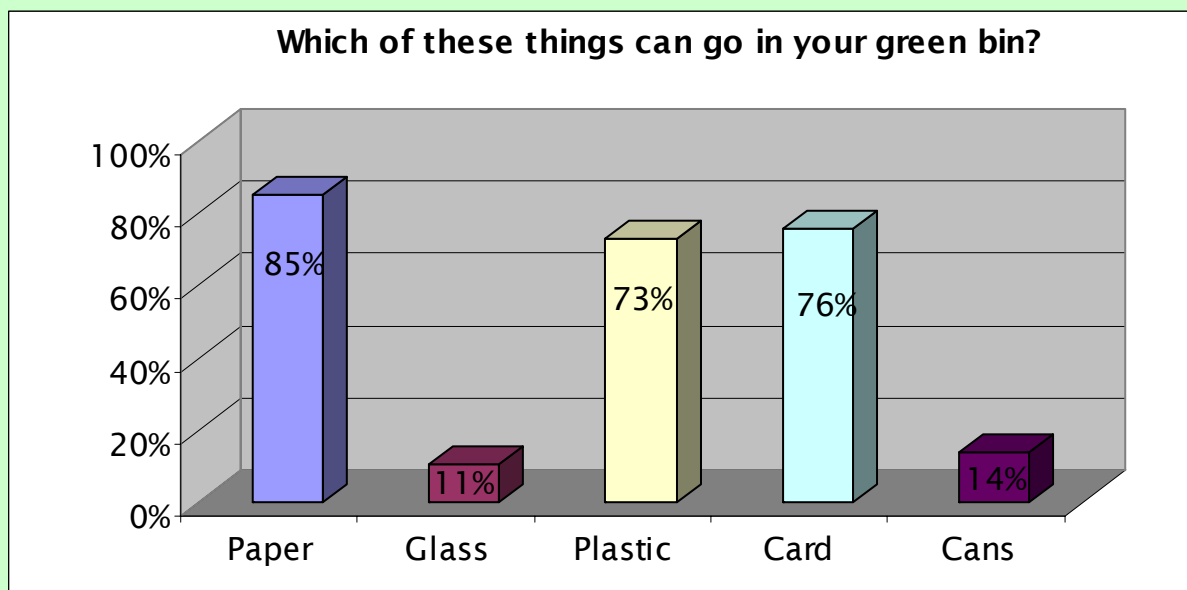




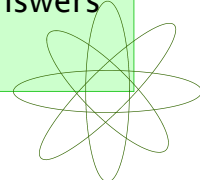
- We thought that these targets were excellent, but perhaps a bit ambitious. We thought that they could only be achieved if the Council did more to broaden the range of things that people can recycle, and to increase opportunities for everyone to recycle.

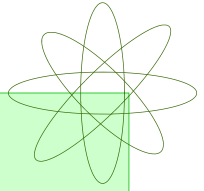
### Opportunities to recycle more things

- According to the Council's website, the following things can be recycled in a green bin:
  - \* Paper - junk mail, office paper, newspapers, magazines
  - \* Cardboard - brown card, glossy card, egg boxes, inner tubes from toilet and kitchen roll
  - \* Metal Cans - drink cans, food cans, pet food cans
  - \* Plastics - types 1, 2 and 4 such as plastic bags, plastic bottles - lids off, plastic milk containers - lids off
- This is the response we got when we asked young people what they thought they could put in their green bin



- Most people got the answer right, which shows that most young people (or at least the ones we asked!) have a good general understanding of what can go in their green bin.
- However, there is also obviously some confusion about what goes in a green bin. 11% of the people we asked thought that it was okay to put glass in a green bin, probably because we all know that glass can be recycled.
- People also weren't sure what type of plastic could be recycled. When we asked young people what else could go in their green bin here are some of the answers we got:





Anything with the  
recycle sign

Tea Bags

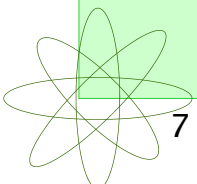
Packaging

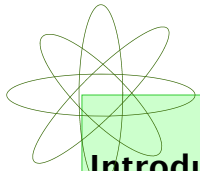
Wood

- The Council recycling collection doesn't accept glass, and it only accepts certain types of plastic. And it certainly doesn't take tea bags and wood! In fact if there are any of those things in someone's green bin it can contaminate everyone else's recycling, and a whole lorry load of recycling could end up going to landfill!
- One way to solve this problem might be to educate people more about what they can recycle. However, the Council already spends a lot of time and money doing this, and as we can see, it doesn't always work. We thought that a better solution (and one which would also reduce the overall amount of waste going to landfill) would be to increase the range of things which the council collects from people's homes for recycling.
- This is particularly important for plastics, because these are often the materials which cause the most confusion and contamination.

#### Recommendation 1

That Leeds City Council works to increase the range of materials which can be recycled as part of the doorstep collection, particularly looking at including glass and a wider range of plastics, and that progress is reported back to the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in September 2009.





## Introducing a national recycling system

- We also found out that Council recycling collections are completely different in towns and cities across the country. To give just one example, Bradford Council does collect glass from people's houses. However, if you live in Bradford you have to put your recycling in a separate insert, and your green bin is where you put all of your other household waste to go to landfill.
- If you consider that a lot of people in Leeds (especially students) have moved here from other parts of the country, then it's no wonder that people get confused about what they can and can't recycle!
- The situation is made even more confusing by the fact that different companies all use different symbols and wording to label recyclable packaging. Sometimes the recycle symbol is hidden away on the bottom of an item, or is so small that it is difficult to read.
- We thought that there should be one system for everyone, and that it should be much clearer.

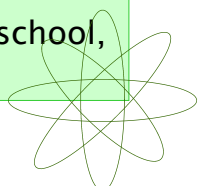


### Recommendation 2

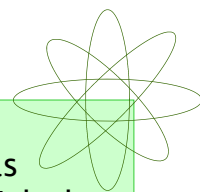
**That Leeds City Council writes to DEFRA to ask that the government looks at introducing a national system for recycling, and a clearer national labelling system for recyclable waste, and that the response is brought to the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in September 2009.**

## Other opportunities for recycling

- Despite the problems listed above, we thought that overall the Council's green bin system seemed to be working fairly well.
- Most houses in Leeds now have a green bin, and the Council has also approved plans to start collecting green bins more frequently in the near future.
- However, we know that it is not possible for every household to have a green bin. For example, if you live in a flat, or a terraced house without much outside space, then there often simply isn't any room for an extra bin.
- At the moment, people without green bins have to take their recycling to a recycling centre. However, these are often out of town, or in supermarket car parks, and can be difficult to get to if you don't have a car, especially if you're carrying heavy bags full of newspapers and glass bottles!
- As a result, people without green bins often put recyclable waste in their black bin, even if they would like to recycle it.
- We think this is very unfair, and that more effort should be made to let everyone recycle - not just people who live in big houses in the suburbs.
- We also thought that recycling should be part of everyday life, and not just something that you do at home, but something that people do at work, at school,







and when they are out and about. This would make people see recycling as something automatic, and would also help to increase the amount of rubbish that gets recycled in Leeds.

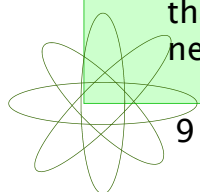
- 85% of the young people we questioned agreed with the statement “Recycling is useful, but we need to do it more”.
- One way to achieve this might be to have more public recycling bins – on city streets and in neighbourhoods where the majority of people don’t have green bins. That way people wouldn’t have so far to travel to recycle.
- These bins could also be bigger and more attractive than current recycling bins in public places. If they were nicely decorated – perhaps by local children or community groups – then people would feel more ownership of them and would be more likely to use them properly.
- 73% of young people we questioned also said that if they were in charge of recycling in Leeds, they would put recycling bins in all public buildings. This is just one of a variety of ways that the options for recycling could be increased.

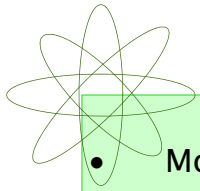
### Recommendation 3

**That Leeds City Council works to increase the opportunities for recycling besides using green bins, with a particular focus on making recycling more accessible to everyone. Options for including larger and more attractive recycling bins in the city centre and in public spaces such as parks should be considered, along with ways to encourage community ownership of these bins. That a report on progress is brought to the Scrutiny Board (Children’s Services) in September 2009.**

### Reduce and Reuse

- When we started our inquiry, most of us thought that the most important thing to do in terms of waste management was to get everyone recycling as much as possible.
- We still think that this is important, which is why we’ve made the recommendations above, but we also learnt that recycling is only part of the story.
- Recycling is often described as the third point in a ‘hierarchy’, the first two points of which are **reduce** and **reuse**.
- It’s important to reduce and reuse our waste as well as recycling it, because recycling still uses quite a bit of energy and this can have a negative impact on the environment. This is especially true of materials like tetrapak (which juice cartons are made of) as these take a lot of energy to sort and recycle.
- Another reason why reducing and reusing are important is because of the current economic crisis. During our inquiry we were horrified to read stories in the paper of Councils abandoning recycling, or storing recyclable materials in warehouses because they could no longer make as much money from selling them on. Hopefully this should only be a short term problem, but we need to bear in mind that there might not be an endless appetite for recycled materials, and that we need to look at other options too.





- Most of the people we questioned understood how to recycle, but we think that more needs to be done to teach the public about the other options.
- For example, people should be encouraged to think more about what they buy and what will happen to the packaging after they've used it.
- Shops could also do more to reduce the amount of packaging they produce, but this will probably only change if customers start demanding less packaging.
- At the moment, most of the information given out by the Council seems to focus on recycling. These are some of the comments that young people made about the information they had received:

Basically just a leaflet saying what to recycle.

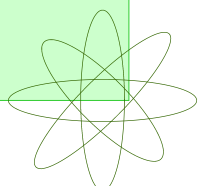
Sheets/ posters showing what to recycle and how to recycle it.

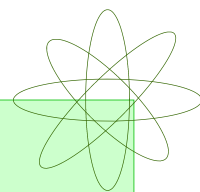
#### Recommendation 4

**That Leeds City Council does more to promote the idea of 'reducing and re-using' as well as recycling, and that it also takes steps to make this easier – for example by working with local businesses to reduce the amount of packaging being given out, and by increasing the amount of facilities on offer for reusing unwanted items. That a report on progress is brought to the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in September 2009.**



*Having an intense discussion at our delegate event...*





## ***Sustainability***

### **Funding for energy saving in the home**

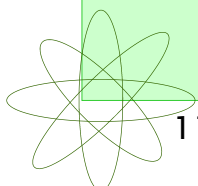
- We felt that the best way to approach environmental issues was to think about how our actions now will affect the world in the future, and whether we need to change the way in which we live to avoid any negative effects.
- The word used to describe this type of approach is sustainability.
- Sustainability is a huge concept which can be applied to almost anything.
- We decided to focus on how people in Leeds could make their day-to-day lives more sustainable by looking at the energy we use.
- Using less energy, and making homes and public buildings more energy efficient can help to reduce our carbon footprint, and in turn this can help slow down global warming.
- During our research we found that there is already some support on offer in Leeds for people who want to make their homes more energy efficient:

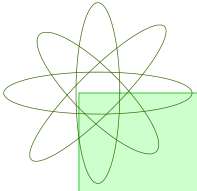
**The Council provides Energy Funding via the energy company npower to the Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs - who manage council housing in Leeds) for cavity wall and loft insulation and a small sum for high efficiency boilers.**

**The Council work with npower to provide 'Community Warmth', a door to door contact mechanism to provide heating and insulation to those on state benefits, starting in the five most fuel poor wards.**

**The Council are working with npower to provide 'Health Through Warmth' grants to private sector households with a health need.**

- There is also a Council-run freephone energy advice line, and letters are sent to targeted households with advice on how to save energy.
- While this is all positive, we thought that the range of support on offer was quite limited. While anyone can ask for advice about energy saving, funding to make improvements to your home is only available to people who live in Council houses, are on state benefits or who have severe health problems.
- The majority of people in Leeds don't fall into these categories, so any changes they make would have to be paid for out of their own pockets.





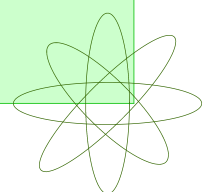
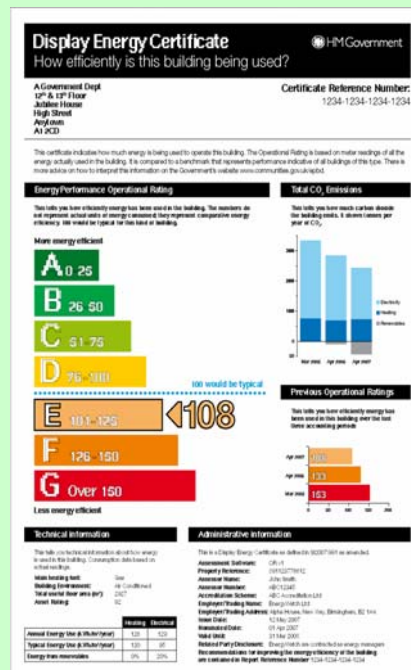
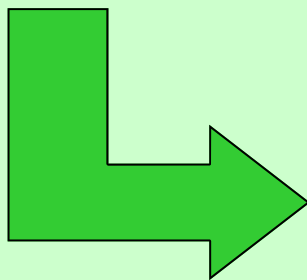
- We also learnt that there is no assistance available for people wishing to install renewable energy generating equipment in their homes, and that there is no relaxation in the planning rules. So anyone wishing to install a wind turbine would have to go through the same process as someone wanting to build an extension or make any other alteration to their home.
- We thought that changing the planning rules would be an easy way to encourage more people to install renewable energy generating equipment, at no extra cost the Council.

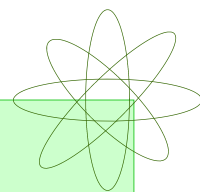
### Recommendation 5

That Leeds City Council does more to help *everyone* in the city to use less energy, by making funding available for people to add insulation, double glazing and other energy saving devices to their homes. More assistance should also be offered to those wishing to install renewable energy generating equipment (such as solar panels) in their homes, and a relaxation of planning restrictions should be considered as part of this. That progress is reported to the Scrutiny Board (Children’s Services) in September 2009.

### Display Energy Certificates

- As well as helping the people of Leeds to live more sustainably, we also think that the Council and Education Leeds have a role to play in setting an example, by making their own buildings more energy efficient.
- We found out about a government initiative called ‘Display Energy Certificates’ which requires all public buildings over 1000m<sup>2</sup> to have a certificate on display which shows how energy efficient the building is.
- The certificates look like this:



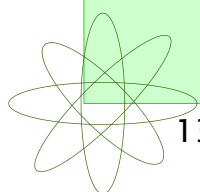
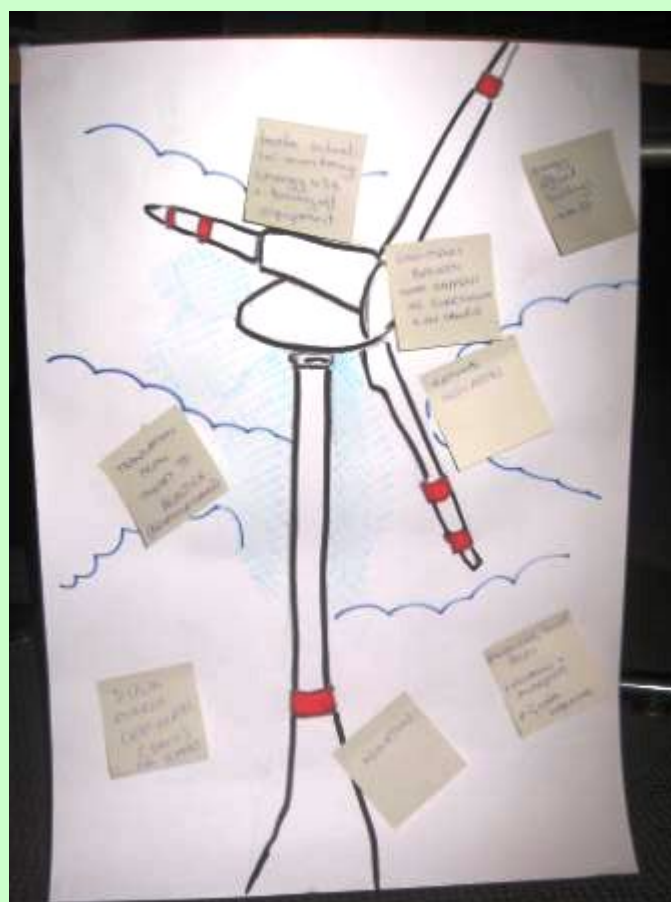


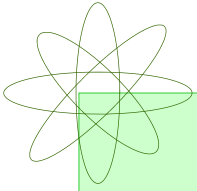
- They are renewed every year so that the public can see whether any improvements have been made.
- We think that this is a great scheme because it really shows up places which aren't doing enough to improve their energy efficiency.
- We looked in our schools and colleges to see if we could find any of these certificates and we also found the Civic Hall's certificate.
- The Civic Hall has an 'E' rating at the moment, which isn't great for the Council's headquarters. It was also quite small and only on display in the reception area, which meant that the people who actually work in the building and go in through the turnstiles wouldn't be likely to see it. We thought that more could be done to let people know about the Civic Hall's rating, and that steps should be taken to improve it.

### Recommendation 6

**That Leeds City Council and Education Leeds show their commitment to improving energy efficiency by having a Display Energy Certificate in every one of their buildings, no matter how big or small, and that every effort is made to improve the rating of each building. The certificates should also be prominently displayed - for example in lifts or next to doors. We would like to see the Civic Hall used as an example of this, and ask that an update on the Civic Hall's current rating and any improvement measures being undertaken is provided to the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in September 2009.**

*The result of our ideas 'brainstorm' for sustainability...*

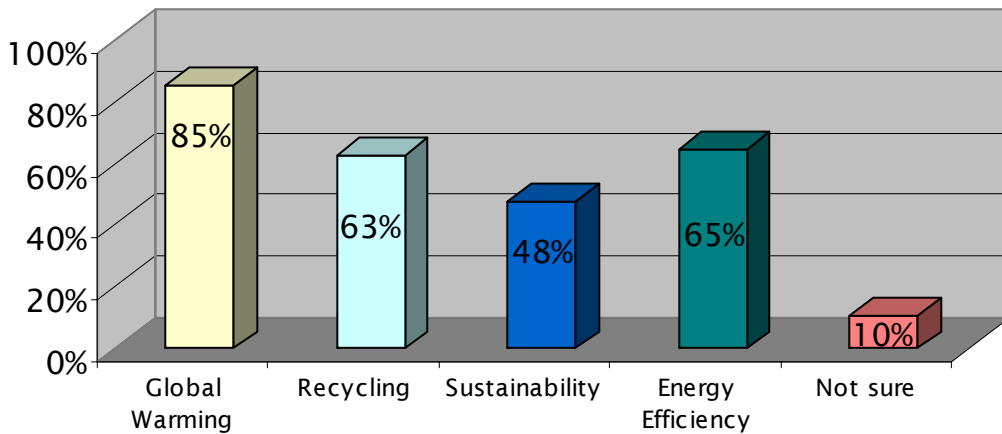




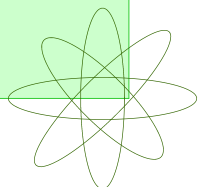
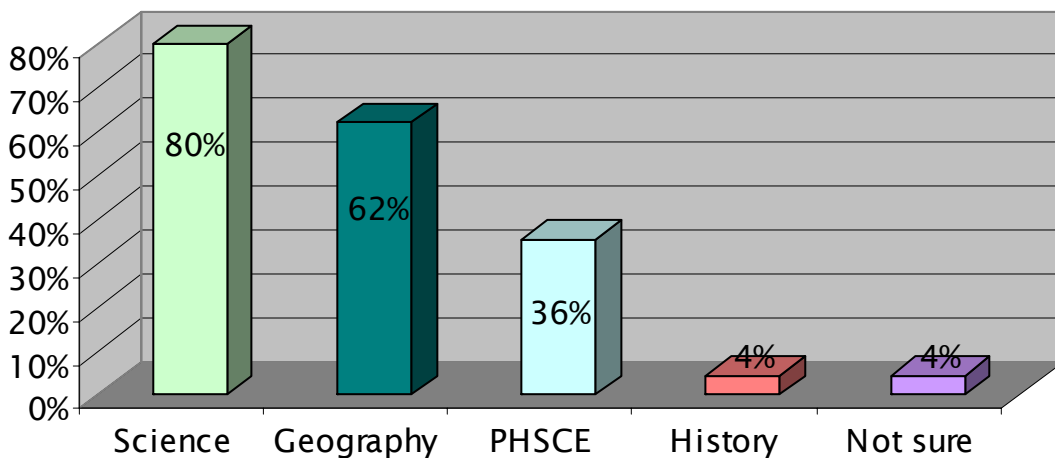
## Education

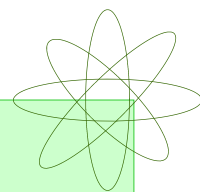
- Thinking about the environment means thinking about the future. Because of this we feel that the education system has a very important role in preparing young people today for the environmental challenges of the future, and teaching them about the difference that their actions can make.
- As part of our survey, we asked young people which environmental issues they have learnt about in school, and which lessons these topics were part of. Their responses are below.

**Which of these environmental issues have you learnt about in school?**



**Which lessons have you learnt about the environment in?**





- As this shows, environmental issues are already part of the curriculum, particularly in science.
- However, when we asked young people if they thought this was enough, 76% said **no**, they didn't think schools taught young people enough about the environment.
- We asked them what they would change if they were in charge of lessons. Here are some of their responses:

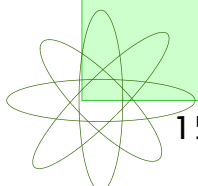
**More regular lessons.  
Always referred to.**

**Make it more engaging  
and appealing**

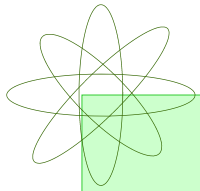
**Just more about it in  
general and what we, as  
young people, can do to  
help**

#### **Recommendation 7**

**That Education Leeds does all it can to maximize the opportunities for learning about environmental issues in all school lessons, and that an attempt is also made to improve the quality of this education, by developing a coherent approach across all areas of the curriculum, and incorporating some of the ideas from 'Philosophy for Children'. That Education Leeds presents a plan for how this can be achieved to the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in September 2009.**







## **Encouraging schools to do more practical things to benefit the environment**

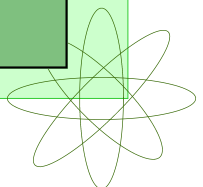
- However, lessons aren't the only way that young people learn in school. Some of the other responses we had from young people suggested that they thought schools should do more practical things to encourage students to think about environmental issues and change their behaviour.
- Some primary schools already do this, and we found out about some great examples. One of these is Farsley Farfield Primary school, which has a mini-organic farm; and another is Swarcliffe Primary, which held a special Environment themed 'Focus Friday' event.
- However, a lot of the young people we surveyed hadn't experienced this sort of things themselves.
- A really obvious way for schools to teach young people about environmental issues, and improve their own impact on the environment at the same time, is to encourage recycling in schools.
- We know that quite a few schools do recycle at the moment, but we were surprised to learn during the course of our research that there is no universal system for school recycling in Leeds, and in fact it is up to each individual school to decide how and what they recycle.
- Leeds City Council has a waste management contract including recycling of which schools can take advantage. However, at the moment only 3% of schools use this system. The rest make their own arrangements with other waste companies.
- We thought that this arrangement was very confusing, and that it also potentially created a system where some schools might not be recycling at all.

### **Recommendation 8**

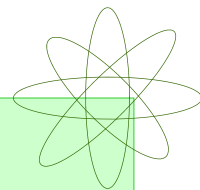
**That Education Leeds and Leeds City Council work together to encourage all schools to join the Council school waste management contract so that they all have the same arrangements for recycling, and so that every young person in Leeds has the opportunity to recycle at school. A report on progress should be presented to the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in September 2009.**

### **Recommendation 9**

**That Education Leeds encourages all schools in the city, particularly secondary schools, to involve their pupils in practical activities to increase their understanding of environmental issues. This could include environment clubs in schools, and city wide activities. We would also particularly like to see young people in every school involved in monitoring the energy efficiency of their school building by studying the Display Energy Certificate and keeping track of how the recommendations for improvement supplied with it are being progressed. A report on this should be presented to the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in September 2009.**





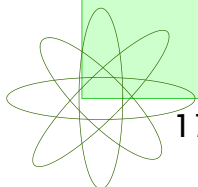


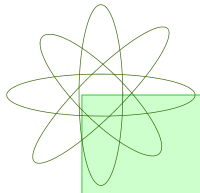
## Sustainable Schools

- Of course, there are some schools in Leeds which are already doing an excellent job of teaching young people about environmental issues in a range of ways.
- Many of these are part of the 'Sustainable Schools' programme, which we learnt about as part of our research.
- To qualify as a 'Sustainable School' a school has to cover each of the following eight areas:
  - \* Food and drink – considering how food for school meals can be ethically sourced.
  - \* Energy and water – reducing the demand for energy and water through energy and water conservation.
  - \* Travel and traffic – encouraging and supporting more eco-friendly journeys to and from schools e.g. walking and cycling.
  - \* Purchasing and waste – reducing costs and supporting markets for ethical goods and services at the same time.
  - \* Buildings and grounds – good design can translate into improved staff morale, pupil behaviour and achievement as well as nature conservation.
  - \* Inclusion and participation – providing an inclusive, welcoming atmosphere that values everyone's participation and contribution
  - \* Local well-being – acting as a hub of learning and change in the local community
  - \* Global dimension – helping pupils to appreciate the impact of their personal values, choices and behaviours on the wider world.
- At the moment, there are 31 pathfinder 'Sustainable Schools' in Leeds.
- Education Leeds has a target of getting all schools in the city to become 'Sustainable Schools' by 2020. This is great, but it seems a very long way off to us.
- A child starting school in 2009 will be almost ready to take their GCSEs by 2020! This means that a whole generation of young people could lose out.
- We think that there is no time to lose, and more should be done to promote the 'Sustainable Schools' agenda as quickly as possible.

### Recommendation 10

**That Education Leeds moves the deadline to make every school in Leeds a 'Sustainable School' forward to 2015, and that it brings a report on how this can be achieved to the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in September 2009.**

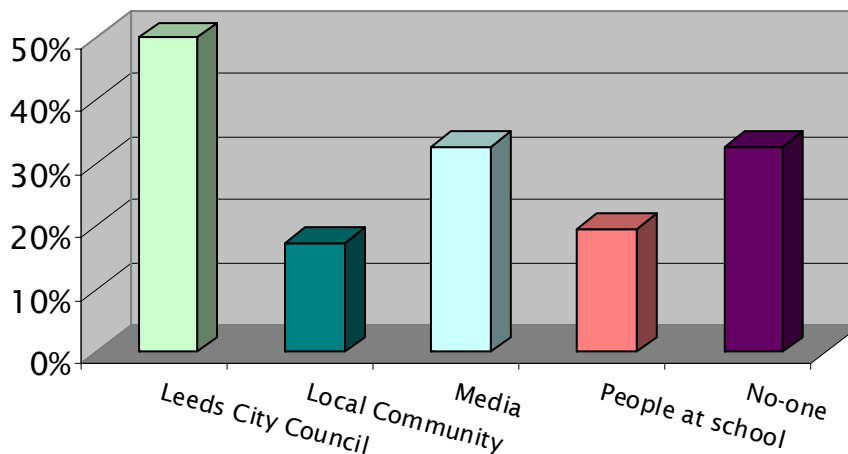




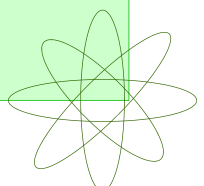
## Environmental Education for all

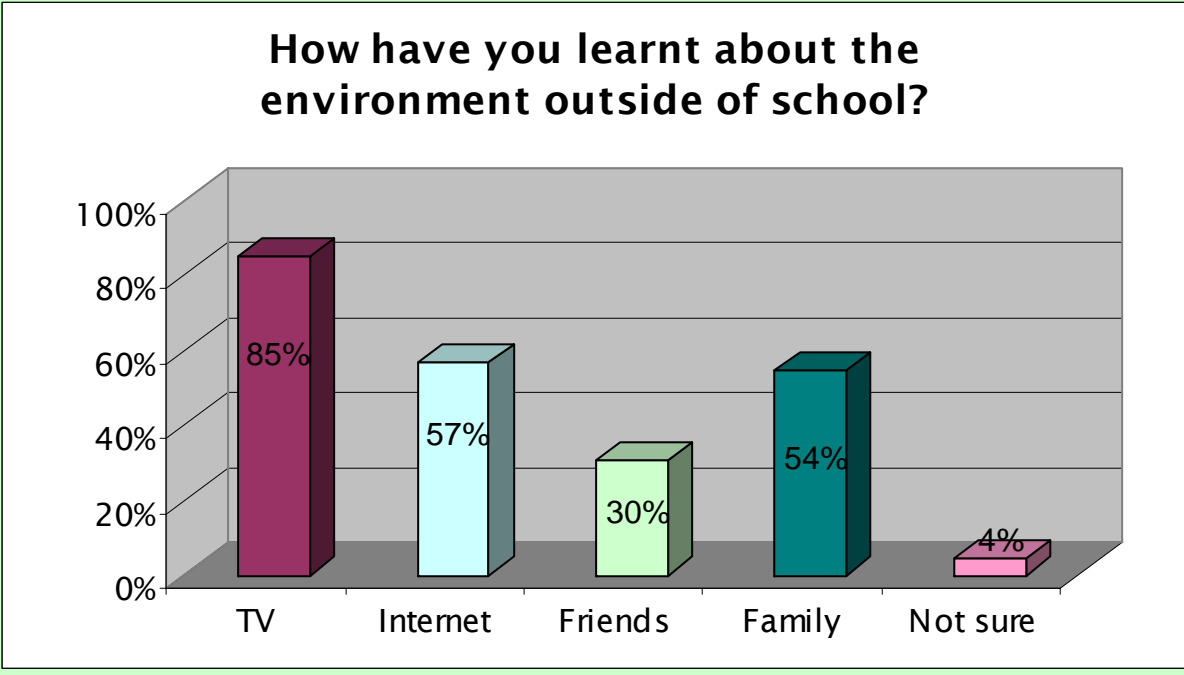
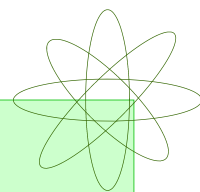
- Finally, we recognise that school isn't the only place where people can learn about the environment, and that there are a lot of other sources of information for people of all ages.
- We asked the young people in our survey about where they get help and information

### Who helps you and your family to do things to protect the environment?



- 50% (the largest group), chose the Council as the main source of support.
- We looked at some of the information which the Council currently provides to people in the city about environmental issues.
- Some of it was interesting, but it was mostly in the form of leaflets and newsletters.
- We thought that some of the language used was quite 'dry' and not very 'people friendly'.
- There was also a huge range of styles and designs, which was a bit confusing.
- And we thought that giving out leaflets wasn't the greenest way to educate people!
- When we asked young people where they had learnt about environmental issues outside school, here is what they told us:



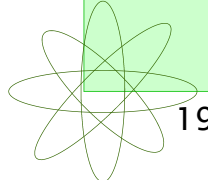


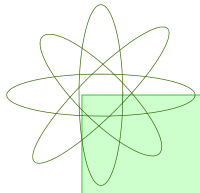
**Recommendation 11**

**That Leeds City Council develops a central ‘brand’ for all of its environmental education materials, and that more innovative techniques are developed for engaging with people, rather than simply giving out leaflets. For example, more use could be made of the radio and the big screen in millennium square and posters could be put up on buses. That the Scrutiny Board (Children’s Services) monitors the development of these new materials over the next 12 months.**

### *Conclusion*

- We know that we have only covered some of the huge variety of environmental issues facing Leeds in this inquiry. For example, we haven’t had time to touch on transport, air pollution or wildlife conservation, to name just a few areas!
- However, we hope that our work has shown how important the environment is to young people in Leeds, and that the city’s decision makers will take notice of our commitment and passion.
- We look forward to seeing how our recommendations are followed up by the Council and Education Leeds over the next few months.
- We plan to ask the Youth Council to establish a way of formally monitoring our recommendations, potentially through the newly established Youth Council Scrutiny Group.





***The Young People's Scrutiny Forum were:***

Sally Leadbeater	Leeds Youth Council
Sukbir Kaur	Reach Out and Reconnect
Connor Prior	Leeds Youth Council
Ashley Linnecar	Reach Out and Reconnect
Ingi Hughes	Reach Out and Reconnect
Matthew Jackson	Leeds Youth Council
Poppy Johnson	Leeds Youth Council and Reach Out and Reconnect
Jessica Clayforth	Reach Out and Reconnect
Charlotte Ingram	Reach Out and Reconnect
Dain Hiscox	Leeds Youth Council
Poppy-Jo Lumley	Leeds Youth Council

