Mayor Andy Burnham Backs Young People Leading Change in Greater Manchester

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Young people across Greater Manchester are stepping into positions of influence, shaping decisions that affect their communities and challenging long-held assumptions about who belongs in civic life.

Youth Leads UK is continuing its Civic Leadership Programme, supporting a diverse group of young people, known as the Civic Youth Leaders, to explore and take up civic roles such as school governors, charity trustees, youth board members and magistrates. The programme equips young people with the confidence, skills and opportunities needed to move from voice to influence.

Through community campaigns, events and the 'Empowering Young Citizens: The Future is Now!' toolkit. Civic Youth Leaders are opening doors to civic participation and encouraging their peers to see themselves as decision-makers rather than bystanders.

The programme has already demonstrated the transformative power of youth civic leadership.

Hannah, 18, from Manchester, joined a Youth Leads UK leadership programme in 2023 to build her confidence and create change. Since then, she has co-created the civic toolkit, joined Youth Leads UK's Youth Advisory Board, become a steering governor at her college, and is now Co-Chair of the Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authority. She has also founded WeConnect, a project that supports young people from immigrant backgrounds to adapt to life in the UK.

Hannah said:

> "Before joining Youth Leads UK, I didn't believe young people could have this level of impact. The programme helped me understand civic roles and encouraged me to step into them myself. I've learned that youth voice isn't symbolic - it's powerful, and it belongs in decision-making spaces."

Maisha joined the Civic Leadership Programme in 2024 and has since become a Trustee for two charities, using her lived experience to strengthen governance and representation. She has delivered the civic toolkit at major youth events, spoken at Youth Leads UK's strategy launch, and shared her experience on panels exploring youth participation in governance.

Maisha said:

> "This programme reinforced my belief that lived experience is its own expertise. When young people are trusted and supported, they bring creativity, accountability and insight that can enrich every organisation. I've found the confidence to speak up in rooms full of experienced professionals — and be heard."

Alongside individual journeys, Civic Youth Leaders have delivered creative campaigns and workshops to help other young people understand their role in shaping society. During Welcome to Your Vote Week, they led a social media campaign in partnership with the Electoral Commission's Get Informed, Get Involved initiative, tackling low youth engagement with democratic processes.

Participants have also taken part in professional development opportunities, including a TED-style public speaking workshop. Civic Youth Leaders later led a high-profile youth takeover of the Greater Manchester Race Equality Panel, hosting debates, design sessions and an open Q&A with civic leaders on the under-representation of young people in decision-making.

The continuation of the programme reflects a shared commitment across Greater Manchester to ensuring young people are not only consulted, but actively involved in civic leadership.

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, said:

> "I want every young person in Greater Manchester to know that civic leadership is for them. We have the fastest growing youth population in the country so it's vital that young people are heard and involved in shaping our future - whether that's as school governors, trustees, youth board members, or the next generation of councillors and magistrates.

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> Getting involved in civic life is essential. It's how we break down barriers, tackle alienation, and make sure everyone has a real stake in their community. Youth Leads UK and the Youth Civic Leadership programme are opening doors to backing young people to lead, to make Greater Manchester stronger."

Saeed Atcha MBE DL, CEO and Founder of Youth Leads UK, said:

> "We're seeing young people find their voice and use it to shape their communities. Civic leadership should include every young person with the courage to care and the will to lead. When young people are trusted with responsibility, they rise to it, and our communities are stronger for it."

Over the coming months, Civic Youth Leaders will host a new series of Your Turn to Lead panel events, bringing together decision-makers, young people and community organisations to explore how everyone can play a role in civic life.

Youth Leads UK is calling on councils, schools and community organisations across Greater Manchester to partner with the Civic Leadership Programme and help expand meaningful civic opportunities for young people.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) has awarded Youth Leads UK a contract to deliver the Greater Manchester Youth Civic Leadership Programme for 2026, following two successful years of delivery from 2024.

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