

Using the Media

The media's influence on forming and reflecting public opinion has been well documented. But we wanted to find out how decision makers use the media to access voters and communicate their messages.

So who better to talk to than Martin Mullaney who is a Birmingham City Liberal Democrat councillor and web designer.

Headliners reporters Cara Harrigan, Cheridan Smith and Melissa Richards caught up with Councillor Mullaney to ask him what he thought about the media's role in politics.

The media plays a crucial role in forming and reflecting public opinion.

We spoke to Birmingham City Councillor, Martin Mullaney (Kings Heath ward) and found that he was enthusiastic about the media's role in politics.

Have you been influenced by the media in any way?

"Well yes and no but don't forget the media represents what people are thinking so as a politician I'm going to be very influenced because ultimately they're the ones that will vote for me.

"As a councillor I have to keep an eye on what has been said in the local media (**in Kings Heath and Moseley**) It gives a vibe on what people are thinking and that gives me an opportunity to find out if there's an issue I need to be aware of."

What is your opinion on media today?

"I think it's great! It's fantastic to think today I can talk to residents on e-groups to get their views on things. You (reporters) probably use MySpace, and I think that's brilliant!

"If you want to have a party or something you put a bulletin on and suddenly you've got 200 people turn up at your doorstep. I remember when I was in the 1970s and you want to get out as a teenager, you'd go out knocking on doors to see who'd come out and you'd get four teenagers on the corner."

How do you think young people today are affected by the media?

"Big time, it's great. Regarding a graffiti policy and how I engaged with other teenagers around my area was by finding their websites and seeing them chatting to each other on MySpace.

"To me it was like a real Sim City watching them chat to each other about graffiti and what they were going to do next, graffiti exhibitions and seeing them talk about going down to Leamington Spa to do some legal graffiti.

"I'd see their photographs of their artwork and think, 'Actually, these kids are really talented and felt quite sorry for them because they don't have a legal graffiti space closer to home and perhaps somewhere safe'.

"It's great seeing another culture, another person's point of view and there's something quite nice about that."

What is your opinion on how young people are represented in the media?

"I think young people are vilified in the media and it's absolutely awful, absolutely terrible and we need to change that because 99.99% of young people are just nice people and it was the same in my time.

"There's always a small percentage of people that are out of control, as there is in adults – why demonise a whole group of people?"

This story was written by Cara Harrigan, Cheridan Smith, 11 and Melissa Richards, 19.

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