

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

8th DECEMBER 2005

Councillors: Peter Argyle (P), Brian Bedwell (AP), Paul Bryant (P), John Chapman (P), Sheila Ellison (*Vice-Chairman*) (P), Sally Hannon (*Chairman*) (P), Sandra Harding (AP), Andy Kilgour (AP), Tony Linden (P), Mollie Lock (P), Gordon Lundie (AP), Tim Metcalfe (P), Irene Neill (P), Caroline Suggett (P)

Co-opted Members: Miss Sue Brown (A), Francis Connolly (P), Angela Creed (AP), Patrick Davies (P).

Others Present: Councillors: Graham Pask Officers: Sean Murphy (Food & Trading Standards Manager), Brian Leahy (Senior Licensing Officer), Susan Powell (DAAT Manager), Tim Kuhles (School Improvement Adviser) and Christine Allan (Healthy School Consultant), Jan Shally (School Drug Consultant) and Jo Naylor (Scrutiny Officer).

Other Witnesses: Didge Oku (The Edge – Manager), Nicola Baggs (The Edge).

PART I

22. APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were submitted on behalf of Brian Bedwell, Andy Kilgour, Gordon Lundie, Sandra Harding and Angela Creed (Coopted Member).

Terry Port substituted for Sandra Harding.

23. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13th September and Special Meetings of 22nd September and 17th October 2005 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

24. SCRUTINY EVIDENCE GATHERING ON UNDERAGE DRINKING

The Chairman welcomed all witnesses and thanked them for giving up their time to share evidence with the Select Committee. The responses given by witnesses were recorded as follows.

Sean Murphy (Food & Trading Standards Manager)

Sean Murphy described the recent results of a Test Purchasing Campaign, where despite efforts to work with local retailers to prevent underage sales, 15 out of 22 retailers sold to 14 and 15 year olds. Further Test Purchasing was planned before Christmas as part of a national campaign.

Information received included:

- Results of the Test Purchasing Campaign will inform the baseline data for the Local Area Agreement targets for Safer and Stronger Communities.
- The proposed legislation on Violent Crime Reduction will give extended powers to Local Authorities to temporarily close down licensed premises for 48 hour periods if found to be persistently selling alcohol to young people.

The discussion included:

- Publicising successful prosecutions and taking action against any illegal sales.
- Observing that alcohol not always illegally purchased; with the need to separate out the consumption and purchasing of the alcohol.

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Brian Leahy (Senior Licensing Officer)

The Chairman invited Brian Leahy (Senior Licensing Officer) to enter debate. He introduced work being done in the area of licensing and the crossover between the work of the Licensing Team and Trading Standards Team.

Mr Leahy described how enforcement action could be directed at three different levels; Personal License Holder, the Designated Premises Supervisor and the Premise Licence Holder, with larger penalties occurring if a Designated Premises Supervisor is found guilty of committing an offence.

Information received included:

- How the new legislation revising the 1964 Licensing Act, revokes the permission to allow 14-18 year olds to consume alcohol with a meal in a public house.
- Additional powers in the new Licensing Act specifically with regard to action against public houses.
- Visits undertaken jointly by Police and Licensing Officers to target clubs, high capacity venues and those pubs with a history of underage sales.

The discussion included:

- Underage drinking in the rural areas.
- The opportunities for education with primary school aged children and upwards.
- Difficulties attributing responsibility for underage alcohol sales when often Designated Premises Supervisors are not physically present on the site of the licensed premises.
- Contacting parishes to establish the extent of underage alcohol sales at local shops.
- Considering joint action with the Local Strategic Partnership.
- Local Authorities with powers to revoke a license for alcohol sales.

Susan Powell (Drug and Alcohol Action Team Manager)

Susan Powell (Drug and Alcohol Action Team Manager) addressed the Committee describing the key themes emerging from national strategies on drug and alcohol; which are categorised as: young people, treatment programmes, community initiatives and reducing the supply of illegal substances.

West Berkshire's Action Plan includes commissioning "The Edge" charity to help with early intervention and treatment of young people.

Information received included:

- Local Area Agreements include targets for alcohol harm reduction and targets on preventing drug abuse.
- Drug and alcohol use in young people often linked to many complex factors including issues of self-worth.
- Alcohol and drugs are both becoming much cheaper and accessible to young people.
- There is strong evidence that it would be beneficial to address issues in respect of drinking and drug taking in primary school.
- The DAAT have commissioned a study into the extent of and perceptions of illicit drug use in the rural areas of West Berkshire and means of effective prevention.

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Didge Oku (Manager at “The Edge”)

Didge Oku described how The Edge was the only drug and alcohol service in West Berkshire, with referrals coming from schools, the youth offending team, the education service as well as parents and self-referrals.

She described how the service delivers treatment programmes, to young people, which are very structured with clear objectives.

Information received included:

- Children and young people who “self medicate” with drugs or alcohol to cope with everyday life.
- The highly addictive nature of alcohol and how children as young as 11 years of age, have been seen for alcohol addiction in West Berkshire.
- Work done to identify triggers for drinking (e.g. argument with teacher or parent) and providing alternative therapies and mechanisms for coping with these stresses.
- How those leaving problematic home environments, taking refuge elsewhere, leads to exposure to new individuals and often drinking and drug taking behaviour.
- How males in the 18-21 age band with a drink or drug problem are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system.
- Difficulties changing behaviour in an individual if those in their environment repeat similar negative behaviours.
- Alcohol as the “drug of choice” for young people seen by the service (all young people seen were drinking even if not taking drugs).
- How frequent excessive alcohol consumption can often result in violent assaults and arrest.
- Of the young people seen by Counsellors at the Edge, males are approximately three times more likely than females to commit violent offences.
- The high rates (60-70%) of chlamydia found in young women seen by the Edge.
- Family therapy and services provided by the Edge are offered to all schools in West Berkshire.

The discussion included:

- Associated issues for West Berkshire including higher than average numbers of young men not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- The lack of a clear progression from drinking onto other drugs.
- The Edge were commended for their work with young people in West Berkshire.

Tim Kuhles (School Improvement Advisor)

Tim Kuhles (School Improvement Advisor) introduced prevention measures being implemented in all schools across the district. He highlighted the difficulties however of measuring the success of preventative action.

Information received included:

- ‘Incredible Years Programme’ designed to provide early intervention with primary school aged children.
- Keeping parents informed through Parent Governor Forums.
- Opportunities to link schools with GP Practices with health advice.
- Early prevention best; drug rehabilitation costs can be up to £50,000 per week for an individual.

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The discussion included:

- Opportunities for using email to communicate with parents on alcohol and drug prevention programmes.
- Teaching of preventative education after Key Stage 5.

RESOLVED to:

- (i) Thank all witnesses for attending the meeting.
- (ii) Convene a further meeting in order to shape the draft Scrutiny Review Report into Underage Drinking in West Berkshire and preventative actions.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.45pm)

CHAIRMAN:

Date of Signature: