

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP

ACTIVITIES FOR TEENAGERS IN WEST BERKSHIRE

MINUTES

Thursday 24th November 2011

Present: Councillors: Sheila Ellison (Chairman), Gwen Mason, Alan Macro, Tim Metcalfe and Ieuan Tuck.

Officers: David Lowe (Policy and Scrutiny Manager), Julia Waldman, Dave Seward, David Appleton, Susan Powell and David Baker.

Apologies: Peter Argyle

1. Minutes of 31st October 2011

Task Group minutes for 31st October were approved by the chairman.

2. Matters arising and update on actions

There were no matters arising from previous meetings

3. The Strategic approach to the provision of activities:

- Youth Service – Julia Waldman

Julia Waldman introduced her session by referring to a number of recent reports:

1. Young people and crime: they're not as bad as we think - 28 June 2010
New research from NFER once again opens up the mismatch between the perceptions of the extent to which young people are involved in crime and anti-social behaviour, and the reality.

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/about-nfer/press/releases/young-people-and-crime-theyre-not-as-bad-as-we-think.cfm>

2. Youth Taskforce study of perceptions in Youth Crime Action Plan areas – June 2010

The Youth Taskforce in the Department for Education commissioned this piece of work to explore the views of residents within Youth Crime Action Plan (YCAP) areas to understand more about perceptions regarding young people and crime, anti-social behaviour and alcohol use/misuse and efforts to tackle these problems.

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RB008.pdf>

3. Young people's civic attitudes and practice – November 2010

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RB060.pdf>

4. DfES Children's Services; The Market for Provision of Positive - Activities for Young People.

This report focuses on the market for the provision of positive activities for young people (aged 13-19) in England. Structured activities (including sports and physical activities, attending clubs and societies and volunteering activities). Unstructured activities that young people choose to engage in during their leisure time (including, for

example, going to the cinema and other similar leisure pursuits).
<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RW75.pdf>

She then went on to advise that the Youth Offending Team manager had observed a drop in youth crime including public order, violence, criminal damage and violence against the person.

Despite statistical evidence showing that fewer young people are now involved in offending, public perception has yet to change, with a minority of British adults overestimating the number of young people involved in crime. This leaves young people facing the challenge of growing up in a culture that has widespread negative perceptions of youth.

In addressing the question of what works for young people, Julia was able to inform the task group that the following factors are important:

- Hearing young people's voices, rather than speaking on their behalf. Young people are getting involved in all stages of activities designed to improve their profile and public image and being given opportunities to be part of the solution to crime. It is also important to allow them the chance to respond directly to the negativity often levelled at them in the media and at public meetings.
- Intergenerational activities can be highly successful. They specifically bring together younger and older people, who can have a particularly negative view, and provide opportunities to learn from each other and to challenge stereotypical views and misconceptions.
- Highly visible activities, including the use of facilities which can be set up in 'hot spot' areas can have significant impacts on public perceptions.

The benefits were:

- Increased engagement of young people in positive activities
- A decrease in negative behaviour by young people
- A greater understanding, amongst adults, of young people's behaviour
- A community-wide improvement in the promotion and profile of young people.

In addressing what needed to be done, Julia advised that local authorities should undertake an audit of current activities designed to have a positive impact on perceptions and measure the impact of these activities more systematically. This would provide clearer direction for those developing, commissioning and championing work locally. Council's should also adopt a more strategic approach with coordinated activities, rather than many different groups undertaking activities independently.

In general, people in more deprived areas more aware of initiatives, as were parents of teenagers.

Cllr Sheila Ellison noted the need to promote volunteering particularly as it had a strong track record in the past.

David Lowe commented that the previous scrutiny review had highlighted there was a need for leadership across all sectors and activities and that the Local Authority should take that lead under the Children's Partnership.

Cllr Gwen Mason noted that all the witnesses had raised the role of schools as an issue as they became increasingly autonomous. It was agreed that the Chairman of the Secondary Head Teacher Forum should be invited to attend the Task Group meeting on 10/01/12.

Dave Seward stated that Local Authorities are not going to commission universal services but will now focus on vulnerable groups and young people at risk.

Julia Waldman commented that improved partnership working in the area of community transport providers may be a way of providing better transport for young people to access town centres and attend local activities.

David Lowe suggested that Parish Planning should be included in the session planned for 10/01/12. There was a 10-15 minute video of young people involved in that planning process that the Members might consider viewing.

- Berkshire Association of Clubs for Young People (BACYP) – Dave Seward

Dave Seward set the scene by describing how BACYP had been providing activities for young people through boys and girls clubs over the last 60-70 years. Today the main focus was to provide young people with inspiration and motivation through the development of personal skills and the provision of activities. BACYP tried to focus on the minority of children who were generally excluded from many activities such as those in Local Authority Care, young offenders, children living in deprived areas. BACYP worked with three main age groups – 8-11 year olds in play groups, 11-14 year olds on a wider range of activities and 14-19 year olds on community lead projects.

Successive governments had “played with” youth services as they imposed different visions and strategies on the provision of youth services. The professionalisation of youth services had worked against voluntary and community groups. Local Authority Youth Services had been badly guided by government – becoming too large/complex and over professionalised, often concentrating on larger population centres. Increased demands for training standards, CRB checks and Health and Safety legislation has deterred volunteer support. Substantial reductions in central government funding had had a major impact on the provision of youth services and the grant funding of projects.

Partnership working amongst Local Authorities, parish councils, voluntary groups, schools, clubs and benefactors had had to take up much of the responsibility to maintain and deliver youth activities.

Cllr Tim Metcalf asked what Local Authorities did well/not well.

Dave Seward responded with an example at Bracknell Forest which by working initially with 16 year olds to build skills, leadership and trust within the community,

went on to develop young team leaders who acted as local ambassadors.

What did not work well were Youth and Community experts imposing their answers on community groups and where services were often tied to 'office hours' only. Weekends and evening activities were essential to work effectively.

It was key to separate youth activities from youth work. Success was all about engaging young people and not just saying how services should be delivered.

Cllr Gwen Mason commented that in West Berkshire we were short of youth leaders and was interested in the example that Bracknell had been working on.

- Cultural Service – David Appleton

David Appleton briefly reviewed the results of recent survey information:

- District survey had for some years had identified that the adult perception was insufficient activities were available for young people and this was ranked as the highest priority for improvement.
- Tellus survey data was available on the web but survey was based 1 school and some of its pupils within our area.
- Paper Chain 2010 a survey of 5359 young people yielded very clear evidence from young people that the top two needs were places to meet to things that they wanted do and transport to/from existing facilities particularly during evenings and at weekends.

David A agreed with David S that Youth Work and Services was very different to working with young people.

There were lots of youth activities available in West Berkshire, operating day in and day out, often run by voluntary groups. There was a need to understand fully what was available how those activities were split by different criteria such as:

- Free vs chargeable activities
- Organised vs self organised
- Based around public facilities – library, pubs, leisure centres, play grounds, skate parks, etc.
- School sector - pre/post school activities, sports leadership.
- Community based voluntary organisation and interest groups.
- Commercial sector –off-peak programme targeted at young people with discounted rates or use of subsidised programmes supported by Local Authorities or other partners

Issues were how to effectively communicate what was available to young people.

Transport particularly for smaller rural communities was a major barrier.

A need to forge improved links and transition between schools and the local community.

Dave Seward agreed that transition was really difficult to manage and needed specific resources to help individual groups achieve a sustainable position.

David Appleton commented that not all schools were welcoming to community links and involvement. The Arts Council was slow to encourage organisations to plan their futures.

Cllr Sheila Ellison thought that parents often only valued the services/activities that they paid for.

Cllr Tim Metcalfe gave an interesting example of Purley who were looking to install a MUGA at a potential cost of £50-70K in a meadow without any lighting or shelter facilities. Did that represent value for money, or would that resource be better put into improving local transport.

Dave Seward agreed that MUGA facilities needed to be carefully controlled and managed to ensure success and they often carried a high maintenance cost. Whereas a sports field/park with maintained facilities such as goal posts, skate park etc, kept free of dog fouling and dangerous dogs and ideally patrolled by local wardens were much more appealing to young people when they felt they were in a safe environment.

Community cinema groups had proved successful in many rural villages but very few offered any content of interest to young people.

Cllr Gwen Mason thought the most common need voiced by young people was the need for small groups to have access to cheap public transport in/out of town centres.

Dave Seward confirmed that needs were constantly changing

Susan Powell commented that lots of young people did not want to be organised but were more interested in having somewhere to hang out together.

David Lowe commented that funding was being withdrawn and costs were being passed down onto local groups and individuals. Youth Services were moving away from universal provision to focusing support onto vulnerable groups.

Dave Seward thought that small local services (often parish council or community based) that focussed on a local issues were much more likely to succeed. General services were too costly and needed to be replaced by small local projects or initiatives.

4. The link with anti-social behaviour – Susan Powell

Anti-Social Behaviour

Notes provided by Susan Powell:

Consulted with Partnership Analyst – access to TVP data – including reported ASB.

Aware that there are other data bases recording reported ASB – Housing Associations e.g. Sovereign.

Difficult to analyse ASB – reporting and definitions change regularly and there have been reclassifications of ASB over recent years.

For today looked at TVP reported ASB data – 1 year 2010.

From data analysis her position was that there is no evidential link between activities for young people (or lack of) and ASB.

Her rationale was that there are many calls to TVP categorised as ASB but this is an extremely diverse category covering:

Noise nuisance (shouting), door knocking and tipping over bins to just being there.

This category also covers – drunkenness, fire, party, domestic, playing football, fireworks, smashing bottles and fighting.

Unhelpfully the majority are just categorised – nuisance/youth.

In 2010:

Total ASB reports – 1370, Reports including the word youth – 822, Others – 548

Currently ASB down 24% on this time last year, Crime down 11%.

Last 4 years significant reductions in both ASB and crime.

But remember not all ASB is youth related.

In respect of locations – hot spots – urban areas where there are more YP – demographics. Villages have ASB too.

Shops – report ASB – but YP will generally gather where they feel safe – victims of ASB/crime – shops are well lit and other people around.

Young people act anti-socially for a wide range of reasons not just because of lack of youth activities - family background and circumstances, mental health and emotional issues, peer pressure, poor engagement with education etc.

If youth activities are removed it can not be presumed that young people who have previously been 'well behaved' will start to behave anti-socially. Similarly it can not be presumed that if youth activities are introduced that those young people who are behaving anti-socially will engage with the activity and stop their ASB.

There have been many situations where activities have been introduced and there has been a perceived impact on ASB – roller barn in Thatcham, but – we need to be careful in drawing bold conclusions as we have not examined which YP participated in the roller barn and which YP are known to the police for ASB etc. It also happened over the summer holidays.

Also remember that youth is a very unspecific definition and people reporting 'Youths' to the police could be referring to young people and/or young adults.

As indicated already ASB covers a wide range of things – many which would happen if there are youth activities or not – they are things that young people do and have always done – playing football, gathering and being noisy and just hanging out.

Young people can be deterred from behaving anti-socially but it requires a multi faceted approach including education, family engagement, police enforcement etc.

Young people can not be deterred from being young people which can include being loud, wanting to hang out in groups and shun 'authority'

Investment – detached teams – work with other officers (Wardens and Police) to engage with young people in their community – where they want to be and

signpost them to the wide range of activities there are – sports clubs, community groups, voluntary organisations.

Encourage young people to do something but can't presume that they will want to participate

Many young people do not want to be 'organised' and needed the freedom to choose what they want to do – Youth Strategy Basingstoke 10 years ago.

Cllr Tim Metcalfe asked was crime and ASB actually falling. He agreed that reported crime was falling but was concerned at the anecdotal evidence that a lot of low level crime was under reported by the public because of the perception the police were too busy to take action. Was the 101 system working properly.

Cllr Sheila Ellison commented that within the Thatcham NAG the roller barn initiative was perceived by residents to reduce crime and ASB – “there were less kids on the street”

David Appleton reminded Members of the Splash Program in 1995-2001 that provided a wide range of activities for young people during the summer holidays was also perceived as having a direct impact on reducing crime and ASB.

5. Future meeting dates and actions agreed

Invite the chair of the Secondary Head Teachers Forum to attend the task group as a witness at 10/01/12 meeting. Action DB

DATE	TIME	LOCATION	Activity
12/12/11	16.00-17.30	CEO's Office	Interviewing Practitioners' Operational View
10/01/12	10.30-12.30	CEO's Office	Interviewing or Site Visit – Views from Young People. Parish Planning – Jo Naylor