

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6 March 2007

### Present:-

**Members of the Committee** Councillor Jose Compton  
“ Jill Dill-Russell  
“ Richard Grant  
“ Helen McCarthy  
“ John Wells  
“ John Whitehouse

**Church Representative** Dr Rex Pogson

**Other County Councillors** Councillor John Burton (Schools)

**Invited Guests** Claire Sangster  
Chris Smart

**Officers** Chris Hallett, Head of Service – Children in Need  
Ann Mawdsley, Senior Committee Administrator  
Michelle McHugh, Scrutiny Officer  
Viv Sales, Principal Educational Social Worker  
Paul Williams, Scrutiny Officer

**Also Attending** David Bates - Fusion North Warwickshire  
Stella Carr – Hybrid:arts  
Stuart Gealy - Nuneaton and Bedworth Leisure  
Trust  
Terry Herlihey, Hybrid:arts  
Russell Marshall, Hybrid:arts  
Rose Piercey - The Bradby Club  
Jon Skinner, Scrutiny Officer, Rugby Borough  
Council  
David Thomson, Hybrid:arts

### 1. General

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly the invited speakers. He outlined the role of the Committee and the different Members and emphasised the importance of hearing evidence from a variety of people who were well informed and able to give their own point of view on issues.

#### (1) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Rev Terry Hum and Councillors Katherine King, Mike Perry, John Ross, Izzi Seccombe, Kam Singh, Mota Singh and Heather Timms.

## **(2) Members Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

Members declared personal interests as set out below:

- (1) by virtue of them serving as District/Borough Councillors as follows:-

Councillor Jose Compton – Warwick District Council

## **2. Scrutiny Review – Alcohol and Young People**

The Chair introduced the speakers and informed Members that Derek Ferguson of Mentor Foundation who would be attending the May meeting of the Committee and David Bates would be speaking on behalf of Fusion North Warwickshire, as Martyn Bailey was unable to attend.

### Viv Sales, Principal Educational Social Worker

Viv Sales spoke about the diverse responsibilities of the Education Social Work Service, which included school attendance, exclusion from school and access to education. She added the following points:

1. A prime target of the service was to be better able to quantify and extrapolate information in order to have clear data.
2. The number of 15-16 year-olds having consumed alcohol in the previous week had doubled over the past 10 years.
3. Young people in the UK were more likely to drink to get drunk than their European counterparts.
4. Abuse of alcohol was associated with vulnerability to crime, anti-social behaviour, poor behaviour and poor school performance
5. Attitudes towards alcohol tended to be shaped by families
6. National statistics showed a proven relationship between alcohol and exclusions from school, but the links were not always made and there was more work needed to clarify this.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

- i. the links between alcohol, bad behaviour and poor attendance were clear but it was difficult to determine the cycle and causes, and to get young people to acknowledge and accept that they had a problem. It was agreed that it would be useful to look at links between attendance and attainment and the possible links to drinking.
- ii. Members noted their concern at the impact of alcohol misuse on capacity to learn and attainment. It was noted that the Healthy Schools Agenda had resulted in an increase in awareness in schools and young people were being educated and given more information on alcohol misuse.
- iii. There was a need to continue to raise awareness and educate young people and to make it safe and productive to talk about issues such as alcohol misuse in schools and with parents.

- iv. Alcohol was available for adults and young people and was part of the UK culture and it would not be productive to merely advocate not drinking.
- v. The culture of drinking in rural areas where young people had little to do should be considered.
- vi. There was work being done in supporting parents and supportive strategies being put in place, which were hoped would help to address issues arising from single parent families or misuse by adults.

#### Stuart Gealy, Nuneaton & Bedworth Leisure Trust

Stuart Gealy outlined the work carried out by the Nuneaton & Bedworth Leisure Trust, Youth Inclusion Team who help to support young people aged 8 – 24 in a range of settings, by providing sporting activities, guidance and advice on healthy living in the form of workshops, and signposting to local sports clubs and activities. He added that the organisation had a four-pronged approach through:

- 1. Youth Contact Team, comprising two teams of two officers providing a reactive service on the streets engaging with young people and residents
- 2. Community Sports Officers who co-ordinated the 11 Muga sites (Multi-Use Games Areas), offering activities from 4.30 to 8.30 pm and during school holidays and involving older people in coaching activities.
- 3. Sports Against Drugs Officers managing sports and healthy living projects providing a diversion away from substance misuse and nuisance behaviour.
- 4. Youth Inclusion Officers working in Galley Common and Abby Wards in Nuneaton providing sport activities and workshops to reduce anti-social behaviour and substance misuse.

He noted the following:

- a. The Trust was partly responsible for the 50% reduction in anti-social behaviour reported to the police.
- b. Alcohol misuse led to numerous other issues such as teenage pregnancy, and the Trust worked with partners (currently 32) to educate young people using their own language and “speak” from a very young age, before problems arose.
- c. Alcohol was easily accessible to young people and at home, and the biggest problem were 14-16 year-old girls.
- d. There was a need to look at adult behaviour and not to blame or stigmatise young people.
- e. All projects carried out by the Trust had a slant on alcohol, drugs or solvent misuse.

During the ongoing discussion the following points were raised:

- 1. Members requested that copies of the crime statistics be forwarded to Michelle McHugh.

2. The sports activities were aimed at girls and boys, as part of a broader range of activities to give young people an incentive and desire to develop and improve their quality of life.
3. The Trust had strong contacts with sports clubs and organisations so that there were exit routes for young people to develop into.

David Bates, Fusion North Warwickshire

David Bates outlined the work of Fusion North Warwickshire, an organisation offered advice and guidance to young people on drugs and alcohol misuse and engaging young people in positive diversions. He added that following a session at Hartshill School they had run a PCT-funded project run in Hartshill, engaging 27 young people on six workshops over the summer holidays ranging from circus skills and working at an internet café to research misuse of alcohol to watching a DVD on the dangers of binge-drinking with in a local Community Police van.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

1. While it was difficult to assess the success of the project in the long-term, the attitude of the young people involved at the end of project was very positive.
2. Members agreed that information flowed from trust and the inter-relationships between partners was crucial as demonstrated by the constructive working relationships Fusion had with the School, Police and Parish Council.
3. It was agreed that a copy of the project assessment report would be included in the archive of evidence from the review.
4. Members acknowledged that with no sustainable funding and one-off projects problems could not be solved, but went a long way towards making foundations and building relationships.

Rose Piercey, Bradby Club

Rose Piercey outlined the work of the Bradby Club in Rugby, which had been in existence for 86 years and provided a safe meeting place for young people in Rugby with educational, social and cultural recreational opportunities. She added the following:

- i. The Club had had more than 6,000 contacts with young people over the last two years, often in the form of good, useful interaction with young people rather than leaflets. It was imperative that young people were not turned away and knew that if they were in trouble they could go to the Bradby Club and be safe.
- ii. The Club were experiencing serious issues arising from young people drinking, especially girls. There was also a tendency for young people who were drunk to become aggressive and physically violent.
- iii. Questionnaires were being given to young people on alcohol to identify the issues.

- iv. Young people tended to congregate in parks, wastelands and isolated areas to avoid being caught. They did think for themselves and often nominated one in a group to stay sober and look out for a group, but often did not grasp the reality of their own situation when drunk.
- v. Girls started seriously with alcohol at a younger age than boys and were more secretive. Boys did not like their girlfriends to drink and both boys and girls hated to see their parents drunk.
- vi. There was need to educate children at a younger age on drugs, alcohol and sex education in order for them to be able to make informed decisions when faced with alcohol and being able to help those who had made the wrong choices.
- vii. Funding was crucial to all organisations for any positive work to happen with issues such as alcohol misuse.
- viii. The Club had received funding for a two-year period to employ a Tier 1 and Tier 2 Drugs Worker (dealing with education and low level drug use prevention and treatment), as the only Tier 1 and 2 Drugs cover in Rugby. Further funding for this role had not yet been found.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

- 1. Members agreed the need for the information received from the questionnaires to be collated and it was suggested that there might be some young people who could do this.
- 2. Members noted their concern at the stark message being given about the age young people needed to be educated.
- 3. Alcohol was socially acceptable, but was one of the most damaging drugs there was and was the biggest killer.
- 4. Young people were not shocked easily anymore, and there was a need to shock those misusing alcohol, particularly those who became violent and caused injury to other young people, through, for example, a visit to a rehabilitation centre.

Stella Carr, Terry Herlihey, Russell Marshall and David Thomson – Hybrid:arts

Terry Herlihey, Russell Marshall and David Thomson spoke about the work done by Hybrid:arts providing inspiration and supplemental education through creative technology. They presented a DVD to the Committee of a number of young people relating their experiences and the opportunities made available to them through Hybrid:arts. They then presented two rap videos they had written and produced on using drugs and teenage pregnancy and added that the use of these techniques being influential through music made it easier to reach young people and the feedback they had received to date had been very positive.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

- 1. The rap videos were available on the online community Myspace and would be shown on plasma screens to young

people in hospitals around the county, many of who would be in hospital because of drug or alcohol misuse.

2. Hybraid:arts worked in partnership with DAAT and the WCC Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator and were looking to holding a screening of the videos in mainstream cinemas as well as distributing them to agencies.
3. While alcohol could make people violent and aggressive, it should be remembered that this was true of all ages and not only young people.
4. Young people generally hung around in groups together because they felt just as vulnerable as older people.
5. Aiming education at 15-year olds was too late as they had, on the whole already learned their lessons but there was no one decision that was right for everyone and there was a need to keep exploring different ideas.
6. Different reasons for alcohol misuse included the desire to be treated like adults, boredom, a boost in confidence and the ability to express emotions.
7. There was an issue about whether fixed term exclusions had the desired effect, as they did not offer young people in difficulty any help, but turned them away from school where they were safe and did not have access to alcohol and gave them a further decrease in self-confidence.
8. There was a need for teachers and those people working with young people not to demonise young people and to show them respect and this was re-enforced by the improvement shown by young people in colleges where they were treated as adults.
9. Members noted their concern that many girls were given alcohol by older men.
10. Members noted the excellent work being done by voluntary organisations and acknowledged the issue around funding.
11. Members noted their appreciation of the rap videos, which brought home what it was like to be a teenager, and wished Terry, Russell and David the best of luck for their futures.

The Chair thanked the speakers on behalf of the Committee.

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Chair

The Committee rose at 12:45 p.m.