

Central Dudley Area Committee 19th January 2010

Report of the Chief Executive

Operation Staysafe in Dudley

Purpose of Report

1. To inform members of the Central Dudley Area Committee of the development and implementation of Operation Staysafe within Dudley since July 2009.

Background

2. "Operation Staysafe" involves using child welfare legislation to remove young people judged by agreed criteria to be vulnerable to a designated place of safety. Within Dudley, the criteria include:
 - Being in possession of, or having consumed, alcohol,
 - Being judged to be too young to be out on the streets at night,
 - Being involved in anti social behaviour but not necessarily committing a criminal offence.
 - Being out in the company of known offenders, particularly adult offenders.

Dudley is **not** one of the 69 areas selected and funded by the Home Office. Dudley has developed a local model funded from local resources. The initiative has principally involved West Midlands Police and DMBC Children's Services. It has been co-ordinated by the Community Safety Team, and is supported by Connexions, Community Renewal Team, Dudley Drug and Alcohol Action Team, DMBC Marcomms, and West Midlands Fire Service.

The scheme differs from previous approaches. The emphasis is now on the parents travelling to collect their child and meet specialist workers from the Children's Services who interview them separately from the young person. Young people who are brought to the safe centre are sensitively interviewed by Children's Services' staff. Further work is carried out with the young person and family.

Local Developments

3. Operation Staysafe has been implemented in Dudley since 3 July 2009, originally piloting 10 sessions across the North Dudley township area during the summer. Additional funding along with some cost savings has enabled 14 sessions to be run between July and Christmas, with the last 4 being combined across North Dudley and Brierley Hill police sectors.

Resources

4. One safe centre has been used for all 14 sessions. It has been staffed regularly by officers from DMBC Children' Services, typically members of the Youth Offending Service), Family and Adolescent Support Team (FAST), the Youth Service and Connexions.

Twelve thousand leaflets were distributed amongst local schools as well as at libraries, Housing offices, community groups, youth centres and at PACT meetings.

Police staffing has been targeted at ASB on Friday nights, with the evening shift often directed towards Staysafe.

The Community Renewal Team staff have helped inform local community groups, and helped distribute leaflets. The Zone and Dudley Primary Care Trust are involved in subsequent work relating to alcohol misuse.

Results so far

5. 43 young people have so far been brought to the safe centre.

35 of these have been brought in from within North Dudley sector, and 8 from within Brierley Hill Sector. 5 of these 8 have been picked up from within the Netherton / Saltwells area. A further 10 young people whose addresses are within Central Dudley have been brought in from Dudley North and Pensnett.

The median ages have been 14-15, and the gender split has been approximately 2:1 male / female. All bar one of the young people were White British.

- Over 85% of young people brought to the safe centre had alcohol misuse as a major presenting problem, including all of the girls.
 - Overwhelmingly, Fridays have been the busiest nights.
 - Only 2 out of 43 young people brought to the safe centre were repeat contacts.
 - No young person has offended since being involved with the scheme.
 - 36 out of 43 young people had their parents attend the safe centre (85%). The parents of the remaining 7 young people were either genuinely unable or else unwilling to attend - of these, 4 young people had other relatives attend, and 3 were taken home owing to particularly exceptional circumstances.
 - No young people were taken into care.
6. The scheme has unveiled a level of vulnerability amongst some young people out on Friday nights. A significant proportion of this stems from alcohol intoxication. Some other young people did not present alcohol as a problem but faced challenging situations both inside and outside the family home, and would have otherwise stayed out until the early hours of the next morning.

- Just over half of the young people were referred to Connexions for either Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) or Common Assessment Framework (CAF) involvement. 3 young people were referred to Children's Services Social Care Assessment Team. In other cases, there were plans for closer working between agencies already involved. Onward referrals were made for further parenting support, and in one case for young carer support.
 - The sharing of skills and expertise was widely recognised as being valuable. The strong relationship building skills of the Children's Services staff helped maintain a calm, caring ethos, and enabled the young person and family to be receptive to the key messages of Staysafe. The young persons typically "opened up" to the staff at the centre, and problems were thus easily identified and support therefore readily offered.
 - There has been good intelligence sharing particularly in terms of under-age purchases and proxy sales of alcohol. This indeed had been one of the original objectives of the initiative. It has been able to support other initiatives such as the Social Responsibility Scheme, and the work of DMBC Trading Standards.
7. Anecdotally, it appeared that trepidation regarding "social work" intervention in the young people's families had an effect in youth ASB hot-spots being subsequently deserted on Friday nights (mirroring the experience in other parts of the country). Paradoxically, the interaction of the young people and the safe centre staff quickly enabled the young people to relax and "drop their guard". The young people (and sometimes, the parents) typically left the safe centre bearing a more positive and reflective persona than when they first arrived.

Parents and relatives attending were overwhelmingly positive about the scheme. Only two showed hostility. Many on the other hand expressed gratitude and support. Many were previously unaware of their child's whereabouts, alcohol consumption, and the potential risks that were being incurred.

Local Impact

8. The overall consensus amongst police officers was that it had been a positive experience bearing a massive impact on the key ASB hotspot areas on Friday nights. In Gornal, for example, the police were receiving 1-2 ASB calls per night relating to young people compared to 35-40 the previous year. Feedback from members of the community and elected Members has been very positive.

Young people will in most instances have been removed from a group of other young people. In nearly all of these instances, it is only one or two young people removed from a larger group, through being judged as vulnerable. The impact of the removal of this small number is multiplied through it being directly witnessed. Communication of this experience through text, instant messaging and social networking sites, as well as by word of mouth at school etc. has meant that the initiative has a far wider resonance. A Staysafe evening operation can therefore be successful even with low numbers brought in.

Anecdotal evidence existed of some youngsters becoming drunk in groups after school, as early as 5 p.m. The early start of Staysafe in the evening meant that young people were picked up quickly and more serious alcohol related problems averted. The subsequent benefit was that officers, no longer now having to deal

with an alcohol fuelled escalation of ASB, were able to attend crime reports far more quickly.

There is no evidence of displacement to other areas. Some “decoy” vans bearing the safe and sound Staysafe insignia went out on other nights.

Conclusions

9. Staysafe can be an effective tool in reducing ASB, providing there is good communication with the general public and young people in particular.
10. Young people, parents and other adult family members **are** strongly receptive to assertive preventative action so long as it is couched in terms of ensuring the young people’s safety and welfare, and of supporting parental awareness.
11. Staysafe addresses the reassurance, and trust and confidence agendas. Action is visible, and can be couched in the language of the popular concerns in a neighbourhood without demonising young people or their families. The support of elected Members proved very important.

Staysafe is most effective when utilised alongside other preventative and enforcement measures both on the night and indeed between operations. This will involve exploring more relevant alternatives for engaging young people.

Next Steps

12. The Crime Reduction Implementation Group decided on 12 November 2009 for a further trial period is given to Staysafe to explore how it can be applied across the borough.

The aim would to gauge whether a system of one or two safe centres operating on a night is the most workable. This trial would cover Fridays between end January and the end of March 2010, involving up to 9 sessions. The Central Dudley township will feature significantly within this next phase.

13. Similarly, options are now being explored for funding and implementing Staysafe across different parts of the borough during 2010-2011, possibly involving over 20 Friday evenings. These would be mindful of the need not to unduly raise public expectations of universal coverage, nor for the momentum or its wider resonance to be lost.

Finance

14. There are possible financial implications for the Council arising from this report. This may depend on the level of in-kind (staff time) contributions to the programme agreed, and any agreed ratio of partnership funding. As reported at the beginning of the report, Dudley’s Staysafe does not receive any direct Government funding.

Law

15. The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act places a statutory duty on the local authority to work with partner agencies, and to do all it reasonably can to reduce crime and disorder within its jurisdiction.

The 2006 Police and Justice Act amended this to also include the reduction of anti-social behaviour as a statutory responsibility.

S46 (3) of the Children Act 1989 enables the police to remove a young person to a place of safety where that young person is judged to be at risk of significant harm.

Equality Impact

16. This report is in accordance with the council's equality and diversity policy.

Recommendation

17 It is recommended that the committee note the information contained in this report.

John Poyles

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Chief Executive

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