
Select Committee on Community Safety and Community Services – 18 March 2010

Report of the Director of Children’s Services

SECTION 17 CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

Purpose of Report

1. To explain the work of the Directorate of Children’s Services in response to the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

Background

2. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires each Local Authority Directorate to "exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area". Section 37 establishes the principal aim of the Youth Justice System "To prevent offending by Children and Young People" and states "that in addition to any other duties, it shall be the duty of all persons and bodies carrying out functions in relation to the Youth Justice System to have regard to that aim" Section 38 places a duty on every Local Authority to secure appropriate Youth Justice Services for their area"
3. The discharge of this responsibility is incorporated within the Directorate’s Strategic Plan and where appropriate service plans have specific actions to address issues relating to Crime and Disorder. It is also a key element contained within the work of the Children’s Trust.
4. The Directorate holds the responsibility for leading partnership work around children and young people in the borough and in tackling issues relating to Crime and Disorder. We work closely with the West Midlands Police and the Youth Offending Service is an integral part of our Directorate.
5. The Directorate also supports the Safe and Cohesive Communities agenda led by the Community Partnership via such mechanisms as the Next Generation Local Area Agreement 2008/11.
6. Essentially the work of the Directorate falls into three main categories and it is helpful to use these as a method of organising this report. These categories are:

(A) Early intervention, prevention and deterrence; the vast majority of the Directorate’s work is of this nature. We work closely with enforcement

agencies but our essential contribution is expected to be in the areas of helping young people to understand the importance of responsible social behaviour, their role in developing an orderly society and helping them to avoid involvement in criminal activity. Most of this report covers this area.

(B) Enforcement; we do undertake some work in this area and it is essential that we do this effectively and in collaboration with other agencies. It is our Youth Offending Service that has most to do with this category.

(C) Prevention of re-offending; Dealing with young offenders and anti social behaviour to prevent recurrence and persistent problems within communities is also key to our work and an element upon which we are closely scrutinised and judged.

Early Intervention, Prevention and Deterrence

7. The education programmes provided through our schools with the support of our Education, Play and Learning Team play a big part here. Behaviour management in schools, Citizenship programmes, and an engaging and relevant curriculum offer all play their part in ensuring that young people are involved in positive and productive activity and understand their role in a well ordered and cohesive community. OfSTED reports on schools in Dudley have hardly ever judged these elements of provision to be less than satisfactory and in the vast majority of cases they are considered to be good or even outstanding. Our secondary schools overall are seen as being particularly effective in these areas. We do extensive work to prevent truancy and absenteeism from school but this is a very difficult problem to resolve with some families being the cause of high levels of persistent absence amongst a group of siblings, and holiday taking in term time remains difficult to reduce. Participation rates in post 16 education have been increasingly steadily for the last ten years and this plays an essential part in helping young people to gain qualifications and to live responsible and prosperous adult lives. However whilst improving our rates of participation in post 16 education, training and employment need to be still higher. The local authority assumes responsibility for commissioning post 16 education and training from April 2010 and this will help us to make closer links between the supply and quality of provision and the local needs of our young people, the economy and the community. Security measures around school buildings are much more effective than they once were and this has helped to reduce vandalism and consequent costs of repair.
8. In addition there is a wide range of targeted activity that is of relevance to early intervention and deterrence. Our Youth Crime Action Plan, the three year plan of the Youth Offending Service, the Youth Service Plan and our Targeted Youth Support Plan are all focused on work to help prevent individuals and vulnerable groups of young people from becoming involved in anti social and criminal behaviour. The common assessment process is being used increasingly with families whose young people are at risk of becoming involved in inappropriate activity. The "Think Family" agenda stresses the need for our attention to be focused on the home environment and the causes of problematic behaviour, not just the individual. Our work on educating and advising young people about the dangers of substance and alcohol misuse, and treating young people for this problem also contribute to the prevention agenda, as does the use of school

premises for evening, weekend and holiday time activity with young people to keep them engaged in positive activities. A particular focus group is looked after children as we know that statistically they are more likely to drift into crime than others. We have a number of programmes to support them and foster carers in developing positive activities, higher expectations and better education and employment prospects.

9. In recent months we have been involved in increasing amounts of partnership work with the police and other agencies in the area of Preventing Violent Extremism. We are providing advice and training to colleagues in the schools sector and other settings about working with young people and families who may be at risk of being drawn into radical activities. The Channel project is a national initiative aimed at guiding young people away from radicalisation and numerous colleagues from across the Directorate will be involved in our local Channel Panel. Overall Government Office regards community tension as being at a low level within Dudley although there are a small number of localities which we monitor closely with a view to providing additional support if needed.
10. A good illustration of an extensive piece of partnership work involving Directorate of Children's Services Staff which is focused upon early intervention and prevention is Operation Staysafe. An account of this project is provided as the final element of this report beginning at paragraph 14.

Enforcement and Prevention of Re-Offending:

11. Enforcement is an area in which we work closely with the police and other partners to ensure that measures are proportionate and in the interests of both the individual and community. As well as action taken by the police range of measures are available to the Local Authority in which Children's Services personnel might be involved including Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, Anti Social Behaviour Contracts and Conviction Related Anti Social Behaviour Contracts.
12. The Youth offending Service is a statutory multi agency service comprising representatives from the Local Authority in the form of Social Work Staff, Youth services and a teacher, probation officers, Police officers, Health workers, Housing Support staff and The Connexions service. This service manages a range of interventions delivered through sentences passed by the courts, which tackle offending and re-offending. The purpose of these interventions are to challenge anti social or offending behaviour and tackle the risk factors associated with offending e.g. unemployment, substance misuse or mental health issues.
13. Prevention of re-offending and rehabilitation are essential activities and we are scrutinised closely for this with the 10-17 years old age group. The Youth Offending Service has exceeded its target. There was a 32.1% reduction against a target of 10% in 2009. This work involves one to one support for young people and their families and considerable effort is channelled into helping young people to become involved in positive activities such as education and training programmes, volunteering and employment.

OPERATION STAYSAFE

14. Operation Staysafe, about which this Committee has already been informed is a good example of the practical activities in which Children's Services personnel are involved. The overall consensus in Dudley North is that it has been a positive experience and that it has a real impact on the key anti social behaviour hotspot areas on Friday nights. In Gornal, for example, the police were receiving 1-2 anti social behaviour calls per night relating to young people compared to 35-40 the previous year. Feedback from members of the community, and elected Members - at PACT meetings by email and at Area Committees- has been very positive.
15. Though 43 young people being brought to the safe centre might appear relatively low, this figure can be considered alongside the fact that these 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 that are removed from a larger group, by virtue of their being judged to be vulnerable. The impact of the removal of a small number of young people is multiplied simply through others directly witnessing this. The communicating 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 if apparently low numbers are brought in.
16. There was initial anecdotal evidence of some youngsters becoming drunk in groups after school, as early as 5 p.m. Due to the early start of Staysafe in the evening, young people were picked up quickly and problems with the after-effects of drinking alcohol were prevented. The subsequent benefit was that officers, no longer now having to deal with an alcohol fuelled escalation of anti social behaviour were able to attend other crime reports far more quickly. There is no evidence of displacement to other areas. Some "decoy" vans bearing the safe and sound Staysafe insignia were put out on nights when stay safe was not running.
17. Staysafe can be an effective tool in reducing anti social behaviour providing there is good communication with the general public and young people in particular. Young people, parents and other adult family members are strongly receptive to the notion of 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. Staysafe is a valuable tool in addressing the reassurance and trust and confidence agenda. It is an action that can be 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.
18. Next Steps; 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. Similarly, options are now being explored for 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. There are a number of options for funding this, including:

- i. LPSA Reward Grant
- ii. CRIG Safer and Stronger Communities Fund (SSCF)
- iii. Home Office / CLG award of £44K towards tackling ASB

Finance

19. The delivery of the programmes outlined above has been contained within existing Children's Services and related partnership budgets.

Legal

20. The report considers the Directorate's contribution in the context of the Council's obligations under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Section 17 places a duty on key stakeholder groups (including local authorities) to do all they can to reasonably prevent crime and disorder in their area.

Equality Impact

21. A wide range of the activities covered in the report also contribute to promoting equality. Crime, anti social behaviour and fear of crime do impact in different ways on particular groups or communities. For example, the report outlines a range of activities for young people who may be at risk of being involved in anti social behaviour or crime. It is better that resources are directed towards those groups in the first instance so that they are prevented from exhibiting behaviour from which the whole community suffers.

Recommendation

22. Members are asked to note the work undertaken by the Directorate of Children's Services in response to Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.



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