

YOUTH OFFENDING TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP

7th May, 2009

PRESENT – Councillor C. Hughes (in the Chair); Councillors Armstrong, Mrs. D. Jones and Long.

APOLOGIES – Councillor Lee, Murray Rose, Director of Children’s Services and Jennie Cooke, Assistant Director, Children’s Services.

Officers – George McQueen, Assistant Director, Planning and Resources, Rita Taylor, Head of Youth Offending Service, Mervyn Bell, Head of Youth Service, Maxine Hepple, Head Teacher, Pupil Referral Unit (Phoenix Centre), David Goodchild, Policy Advisor and Karen Graves, Democratic Support Officer.

Outside Organisations –

Neighbourhood Policing Team – Inspector Alison Jackson

Interim Education Manger, Clervaux Trust

Drug and Alcohol Action Team – David Gardiner

Community Safety Partnership – David Haddick

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised the Group that this meeting had been arranged following a report submitted to Children and Young People Scrutiny by Rita Taylor. David Goodchild had been requested to formulate a list of specific issues and performance indicators relating to youth offending for which Children and Young People (CYP) Scrutiny had responsibility for monitoring, namely **NI 043** Young people within the Youth Justice System receiving a conviction in court who are sentenced to custody; **NI 044** Ethnic composition of offenders on Youth Justice System disposals; **NI 045** Young offenders engagement in suitable education, employment or training; **NI 046** Young offenders access to suitable accommodation; **NI 051** Effectiveness of child and adolescent mental health (CAMHS) services (relating specifically to young offenders or those at risk of offending); **NI 111** First time entrants to the Youth Justice System aged 10-17; **NI 115** Substance misuse by young people. David Goodchild presented some tables and information on the Indicators which prompted discussion as detailed below :-

- In relation to NI043 it was stated that this Indicator referred to very small number of people and the addition of one more person could have a very large affect on percentages –officers advised that national figures could be provided in order to give an indication of comparative figures. Offenders who had committed more than one offence also had an impact on the figures although it was very rare for young offenders to receive a custodial sentence. Following a custodial sentence an analysis was always undertaken to determine if this could have been avoided and research done by the Magistrates’ Court had suggested that all sentenceds were warranted.
- Drug related offenders were always offered rehabilitation as part of the Court Order and the Substance Mis-Use Term were always available to help at high level cases. In relation to drug/alcohol related offences it was reported that alcohol was the greatest problem and that one-third of offenders were female and two-thirds male. Females were

more likely to binge drink and create a risk to themselves – teenage pregnancies were high and it was suggested that this could be related to binge drinking.

- School children were given some information on the effects of alcohol on the body and NHS Darlington (formerly the PCT) supported a range of projects and provided a point of access if required. The Police representative advised that areas of anti-social behaviour were targeted by Wardens, Community Teams and Youth Engagement Officers encouraging children not to drink alcohol.
- Ms. Petersen, of Clervaux Trust, advised that she worked with 10 to 18 year old students who had fallen out of education due to drugs or alcohol, with one student not attending school for 18 months. The biggest problem for children was the lack of things to do and the older they got the less help there was available.
- Mr. McQueen advised that the Council were pleased to have a partnership with Clervaux Trust and they worked hard to keep the NEET (Not Engaged in Education, Employment or Training) figures low. Certain children were difficult to reach i.e. travellers and Clervaux provided an alternative attitude to education by teaching other skills such as basic farming, bakery or carpentry which engaged as well as provided a skill.
- The Police referred to a Talk to Me event which involved a bus touring Darlington as part of the Stay Safe Operation which provided better interaction for children.
- The Group were advised that there were plenty of activity options available for children but the links needed to be in place to make young people aware of those activities which included arts, leisure and sport.
- Work was ongoing with Arriva, following DOSH funding, for a teen card which offers reduced fares and as Clervaux Trust was in Croft, over the bridge, the teen card would need to be advertised.
- Finally it was stated that it was important that links were established as there was a need to prepare children for both custody and release, work which was undertaken by the Switch Team. Children in custody were placed locally and funding was available for parents to undertake visits, officers sometimes took parents to visits if attending a meeting and a video link was available from Middlesbrough.
- In relation to NI044 it was reported that there had been a 100 per cent increase as there were now two black offenders as opposed to one previously. Work with ethnic families was ongoing and cultural issues were challenging but could be overcome. Work was also ongoing with the travelling and gypsy community as history had shown it was better to gain an understanding of cultures in order to overcome problems.
- In relation to NI045 it was reported that the target had been locally set at 70 per cent and this had been achieved although the education of 16 years and over remained a challenge. A Member stated that it was interesting that the target was 'suitable engagement' and not 'provision' and Officers confirmed that children in this category would be less likely to be NEET as post 16 year old could choose to leave education therefore the NEET figure would be activated however the Government are now looking to raise compulsory education to 18 years old and this overcome this. A report was to be submitted to a future Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in July which would provide

further clarification. A Youth Management Board was also scheduled for June and the relevant information could be brought to this Group once the data was analysed.

- The Group were advised that some children needed relevant cross-agency support to ensure they got relevant help and advice. The Council is working with Groundwork Trust in order to get work which was done by young offenders i.e. allotments, gardening accredited.
- The Head of Youth Service also stated that there was a role for schools to provide support for children that had fallen out of school and responsible adults were needed to look after them from the earliest opportunity as it was difficult to recover if left too long.
- The Community Safety Partnership Representative stated that a new project had been launched which nurtured the needs of children to ensure they were capable of getting back to mainstream education. It was also reported that there were currently 300 young people on a Youth Offending Order, this number was slowly decreasing and equated to less than five per cent of Darlington's youth population.
- With regard to NI046 - Young Offenders access to suitable accommodation it was reported that the Youth Justice Board was currently looking at what was deemed 'appropriate'. The Group indicated they thought B & B was not 'appropriate'. It was also stated that the same standard was used as for a Youth In Care and B & B establishments were only used in extreme cases with the preferred option being help being given to parents in order for them to support their children.
- The Group were advised that NI051 – Effectiveness of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) would be followed up at Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee.
- In relation to NI111 – First time entrants to the Criminal Justice System aged 10 to 17 Members were advised that the target was 275 and with the current figure at 134 that was a huge improvement. Officers were proud of this NI and advised the Group that Government Officers had come to Darlington to observe. It was also reported that the Council had a responsibility for delivery of the target but relied on many partnerships in order to achieve it. Children were less likely to offend if they were in a school and a Member suggested that out of school activities should be extended in order to give children something to do.
- Following a question by a Member, The Community Safety Partnership representative advised that there were two Prevention workers posts at Eastbourne and Hummersknott respectively.
- It was further advised by the Neighbourhood Policing Team that funding had stopped for the Safer Schools Co-ordinator for Eastbourne although attempts were being made to get a nominated Officer to the school on a regular basis as exclusion rates had drastically reduced whilst an Officer was in place. It was also reported that social activities were well promoted and youth worker activities were better attended.
- In relation to NI115 it was reported that the information had been collected from a very small survey and a request for a greater survey amongst secondary pupils had been

requested.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That in relation to NI043 national data be provided in order to compare figures.

(b) That NI051 be followed up at CYP Scrutiny Committee.

(c) That Anti-Social Behaviour figures be presented to CYP Scrutiny Committee in order to show trends.

(d) That the above information be absorbed prior to any decision on the future of the Review Group.