

INTERNET SAFETY TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP

FINAL REPORT

Introduction

1. This is the final report of the Internet Safety Task and Finish Review Group established by this Scrutiny committee to examine internet safety.

Information and Analysis

2. At the meeting of this Committee held on 9th November, 2009 Members received an urgent report on Internet Safety following the tragic events reported in the news recently which involved a young Darlington woman and a social networking website.
3. John Steel, the Lead Improvement Officer, Learning Technologies Team attended Scrutiny to advise us on what is being done in our schools and colleges to keep our children and young people safe. The presentation highlighted the benefits of the internet but contrasted this with the risks that children and young people face when interacting with others on the internet. Members were particularly concerned to learn that no specific advice is contained within the national curriculum and that the Council relies on advice from other resources.
4. Resources currently relied upon included: The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) have produced a CD to advise children and young people on internet safety and this has been circulated to all Year 7 households in the borough. The CEOP also publish a very useful web page, catering to all ages www.thinkuknow.co.uk. There is also advice and support for children via Childline on Tel. 0800 1111 or visiting the NSPCC's website www.there4me.com.
5. In Darlington internet provision is accessed through a regional network funded through a consortium of local authorities, the Northern Grid. This internet provision provides the most stringent of filtering and security systems to safeguard, as far as possible, its users against accessing internet content that display: As part of its security policies, social networking sites such as 'MySpace', 'Facebook' Bebo, Twitter, etc. as well as 'Chatrooms' and 'instant messaging' sites, like MSN which have become so very popular with young people, are routinely blocked.
6. It was agreed at that meeting of Scrutiny for Members to commence additional work in the form of a Task and Finish Review Group in order to make appropriate recommendations to Cabinet regarding the provision of internet safety advice to all children, young people, parents and carers.
7. A meeting of the Task and Finish Review Group was held on Monday, 16th November, 2009 to which all Members of this Scrutiny Committee were invited to attend along with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children's Service and the notes of that meeting are attached (**Appendix 1**).

Conclusion

8. Members agreed that the emergence of the internet as potentially the most versatile aid to learning can not be disputed, however, the internet has evolved without proper control and for every 'legitimate' website there may be a hundred or more that prey on the vulnerable.
9. Members concluded that they were in no doubt that adequate safety measures and elaborate filtering security systems are in place in our schools and colleges but this does not necessarily extend to homes and young people have other access to the internet via their personal mobile phones which can be even harder to regulate.

Recommendations

10. That e-safety be part of the school curriculum and it be included in the work of schools within Darlington.
11. That continuous improvements be made to education on e-safety and reviewed appropriately.
12. That every child be made aware of a contact point or person within their school or public internet access site (college, library, community centre etc) to whom behaviour believed to be unacceptable or frightening can be reported with the expectation that appropriate advice and assistance can be given. This information should be available as a reminder as each young person logs onto the computer (pop-up screen).
13. Appropriate message on e-safety to be distributed to every household (via a Council publication and/or website message) providing all residents with advice and information and a named contact officer at the Council with whom they may raise questions or concerns.
14. Parental workshops to be made available, content of which would be based upon suggestions from parents/carers themselves. This could be gauged on the answers to a brief questionnaire in the Town Crier or other means of communication (with recommendation 13).
15. As a means of educating the wider community that varied text relating to e-safety 'pop up' at log on on all publicly provided computers in Darlington.
16. To hold a Safer Internet Day to coincide with European E-Safety Day held each year and this year held on 10th February, to involve all sectors of the community in its preparation (especially encouraging the involvement of young people and the Children's Forum and the most vulnerable in our Darlington community).
17. That work be undertaken to ensure that our Looked After and Foster Children have the e-safety advice and supervision whilst out of the school environment that they may require, with appropriate pastoral care to reinforce this advice.
18. To call on all relevant parties within the Darlington community (including the Council, Children's Trust, Police, Community Partnerships, School Community etc) to establish an e-advisory committee where we can map the work that is currently done to deliver a safer

internet and where we can respond to the e-safety needs of our citizens in a co-ordinated, efficient and effective way.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Background Papers

Report of the Director of Children's Services, Safeguarding Children and Young People When using the Internet 9th November, 2009.

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