

AGENDA ITEM:

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

12th FEBRUARY 2008

**COMMUNITY SAFETY and LEISURE
SCRUTINY PANEL**

“TEENAGERS HANGING AROUND”

FINAL REPORT

**A SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION INTO
TEENAGERS HANGING AROUND**

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 The purpose of this report is to present the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel's assessment and proposals on teenagers hanging around in relation to the agreed Terms of Reference of the Scrutiny.

OVERALL AIM OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

- 2 The overall aim of the Scrutiny Investigation was to assess the concerns raised by the Council's Auditors and make appropriate recommendations which would address these concerns.
- 3 To present the findings of the Scrutiny Investigation to the Executive for their consideration.

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

- 4 The Following outlines some proposed **Terms of Reference** for the Panels consideration. These are based on the discussions resulting from the Panels' initial discussion on 3rd July.
- Explore and identify the key issues, which the Auditors considered significant in bringing this subject to Members attention.
 - What are the links between residents feeling less well informed about the Councils actions and teenagers hanging around and what is being undertaken to address this,
 - Are there any direct links between teenagers hanging around and anti social behaviour or is it primarily one of perception.
 - What is the Council or Middlesbrough Partnership doing to address this concern in either marketing or driving activities to attract teenagers away from hanging around

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 5 **Setting the Scene** To set the scene, the Panel considered it was important to ask a fundamental question; why do teenagers hang around ?. From the information received it was found that, mainly, it is for social interaction, supported by the view that when in a group teenagers feel safe. Such attitudes were not surprising, as it was found people tend to feel intimidated and therefore less safe where there are groups of youths, regardless of whether there is any real threat. A range of interviews across the country, undertaken by New Deal for Communities, with young people has received a frequent response that, if alone teenagers have a fear of attack, which is one reason why they spend time in groups: "with friends I feel safe". Many young people responded that they were aware adults' have a fear of gangs of youths as they may look intimidating, but few are linked to crime, and indeed rarely is youth crime committed by large groups
- 6 There is however, a stronger relationship between changes in fear of crime and in numbers of residents who see teenagers hanging around as a problem. NDCs research found that where there is a relatively large fall in residents perceiving Teenagers hanging around to be a problem this also correlated to reductions in feeling unsafe.
- 7 The Anti-Social Behaviour Bill gives Police new powers to exclude anyone under the age of 16 from an area after 9pm if they are unsupervised by an adult. Additionally, on the authority of a senior officer, Police will be able to disperse or send home groups of two or more unsupervised teenagers.

This may appear a reasonable power to deal with anti-social behaviour. However, the Panel were not convinced that it was reasonable to move on teenagers simply because their "presence" gives rise to alarm or distress. Consequently, the Panel wanted to know the evidence and severity behind the Auditor's remarks but also the relationship between perception and reality in Middlesbrough.

PANELS SCRUTINY EXAMINATION

- 8 The subject area selected by the Scrutiny panel and endorsed by OSB for examination was identified as "Teenagers hanging around". This subject was brought to the Boards attention through the Audit Commission's Annual Audit and Inspection letter presented to OSB on the 5th June 07.
- 9 The Annual Audit letter contains a section titled "User's Views" which references three areas of concern the Auditors consider the Council should give greater attention to. One area being the subject identified for this Panel's attention, which is an apparent increase in resident concern about teenagers hanging around. Consequently, contact has been made with the Auditors to obtain background information regarding the following
 - How and when the information was obtained and analysed.
 - Did the Audit Commission undertake the survey themselves?
 - The size of the survey
 - What were the actual concerns and did they affect people's lives
- 10 The results of the above enquiries were basically that the Audit Commission commissioned a user satisfaction survey in the Tees Valley. This survey was derived from the Local Area Agreement; Best Value Performance Indicators. Middlesbrough Council on the Audit Commission's behalf undertook the survey. The results were then analysed and presented in the Auditor's Annual letter to the Council. The concerns are that Middlesbrough is in the upper quartile from the BVPI survey on residents with concerns about teenagers hanging around. The Panel was informed that information from a neighbourhood survey linked teenagers hanging around closely with the Respect Agenda in tackling Anti Social Behaviour where indications were that parents are not taking responsibility for the actions of their children.
- 11 The Audit letter stated that some residents felt less well informed about the Council's services in 2006 than in 2004. Consequently, the Panel intended to enquire if the lack of information/publicity about teenagers contributed towards residents feeling that teenagers hanging around to be a problem and perceived link to anti social behaviour.

Council's Auditors

- 12 As referenced earlier in the report, this subject was triggered by a reference from the Council's Auditors in their annual Audit and Inspection letter as an

area of concern. The reference being – *Users’ felt less well informed about the Council’s services in 2006 than in 2004. The concerns about teenagers hanging around, public transport and waste collection seem to be those, which the Council should give some greater attention to in order to maintain its improvement journey.* Consequently the Auditors were invited to the Panel to explain the background and provide evidence to support this statement.

- 13 The Panel found that this statement was born from a user satisfaction survey from which the Auditors had deduced that Middlesbrough was in the upper quartile of residents concerns of teenagers hanging around. Also, from the survey, there is reference to a high percentage of parents not taking responsibility for the actions of their children which was believed to lead to a connection with anti social behaviour. However, the Panel found that the results were actually very similar to every authority in the Tees Valley and that the responses from the public were more related to perception than reality. Ironically, from the survey used by the Auditors, while it states that across the Tees Valley there has been an overall concern by residents about teenagers hanging around. The survey goes on to say that Middlesbrough has a slight drop in concern, evidenced in the 2007 survey compared to the 2004 survey in relation to teenagers hanging around. Therefore the Panel was unclear why the Auditors had presented this in a manner, which indicated that Middlesbrough had a significant problem with teenagers.

Survey information

- 14 Following the Panel’s engagement with the Auditors the Panel considered it wanted more information on the surveys from which the Auditor based their remarks. The Panel received information from the Council’s officers on how these surveys should be interpreted and how they are used to inform various plans and initiatives.
- 15 It was conveyed that the Neighbourhood Survey engaged with people directly and that it had the appropriate sample size to validate the results. However, the Auditors had based their remarks on the more limited BVPI survey where the numbers were only 1100 people. The Panel also considered the questions in the BVPI survey to be rather limited.

Community Protection

- 16 The Council’s Community Protection service outlined to the Panel the actions being pursued by the Community Safety Partnership to tackle residents concerns and evidence the links between the perceived and actual levels of teenagers hanging around and anti social behaviour.
- 17 It was expressed that there are young people who do not use activities, which are specifically provided for the youth and can become involved with anti social behaviour activities. However, this is less than 10% of the teenage population in Middlesbrough and the numbers are reducing. Although many facilities are still not available at night or weekends when they may be used to

divert attention from anti social behaviour order, especially when a lot of incidents are reported between 7.0 and 11.0 p.m.

- 18 The reasons why teenagers engage with anti social behaviour can be very complex and factors such as underage drinking, drug abuse, poor parenting, family history, truancy, unemployment, deprivation, medical factors etc are just a few of the potential issues which can contribute to such behaviour. To tackle these issues it was conveyed to the Panel that there is a range of agencies available to support and assist people away from such behaviour. In practice it is sometimes found that 20 agencies work together to assist and support one family, hence the successful Family Project (as presented to the Panel during a previous Scrutiny examination) was a significant factor in assisting families away from anti social behaviour. The service was clear about the need and subsequent benefit of changing people's perceptions. This can include more effective publicity, regular feedback to residents, increased anti social behaviour order leaflets.
- 19 The Panel found that the range and detail of the information provided to be valuable and that clearly there are primarily two strands to tackle. One being the need to divert the small number of teenagers who do engage with anti social behaviour away from that activity. Second to improve public perception with positive messages that in reality the vast majority of teenagers do not partake in anti social behaviour and simply engage in friendly social activities.

Safe in Tees Valley

- 20 Safe in Tees Valley promotes community safety across the area and presented to the Panel the national and local picture on anti social behaviour. This addressed perception and also the rights and responsibilities of young people. Safe in Tees Valley outlined their three levels of intervention, being intensive, preventative and universal. Safe in Tees Valley also operate a Youth Bus and this was made available for the Panel to observe the facilities it has and also how it operates and engages with the youth of Middlesbrough. In practice it was found that the Youth Bus had contributed to diverting youngsters from anti social behaviour, which reduced crime in areas where it operated. The youth Bus is also used to reassure the public and encourage constructive use of individuals leisure time.
- 21 Funding is frequently a concern for the continued operation of such initiatives and the Youth Bus in no exception. The Panel was appraised that the bus presently cost £80K per annum to run and due to resources it could not operate town wide. Therefore its operation was targeted to areas most affected by crime and anti social behaviour.
- 22 The Panel appreciated that it is always difficult to measure success against such complex problems which involve a range of agencies to work either individually or collectively to tackle these issues. The panel found that identifying specific or individual impact is hard to identify. However, the

evidence that the number of anti social behaviour incidents fell when the Youth Bus was in the area gave a positive indication of its effectiveness.

Leisure Service Middlesbrough

- 23 The Panel considered that one aspect of Teenagers hanging around and also anti social behaviour may be associated with the range of facilities currently being offered which would either contribute to teenagers health and social engagement while also diverting them away from potential anti social behaviour. The Sport and Leisure service outlined an initiative titled "Making Middlesbrough more Active". This initiative has three objectives, one of which is to offer diversionary activity to young people in Middlesbrough. The Panel was appraised of the Leisure services offered through seven different venues across the town, which had attracted almost 250,000 visits by young people last year.
- 24 In using a structured environment, such as leisure services for engaging with the youth, inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated. However, in practice the vast majority of teenagers behave appropriately which illustrated their willingness to avoid bad behaviour when an alternative activity is available.
- 25 The Panel again explored the issue of cost and recognised that the Leisure Service has to generate an income of £3.171 million each year. The Panel appreciated that this was Council Policy but did recognise that cost could be a deterrent to many, especially teenagers. The Panel recognises that these Leisure services are not just for teenagers. However, in recognising that these issues are complex and when other social responsibilities come to the fore for health and well being of residents. The impact of charges is a factor in achieving a number of core objectives, which would also address teenagers hanging around.
- 26 The Panel considered that the Council's pricing policy was a key issue in encouraging youth into activities which would be beneficial to health and also impact on teenagers hanging around and anti social behaviour. Consequently, the Panel would recommend that the pricing policy be examined and that issues of social responsibility and not simply income generation be a driving factor.

Cleveland Police

- 27 A key issue the Panel wanted to address with the Police was the evidence regarding perception against reality in relation to teenagers. Therefore the Police were asked to attend and a Fact V Fiction meeting was held.
- 28 The Police conveyed a range of valuable detail illustrating that during a sample period of eight months 55,349 incident calls were received of which 12,945 related to Anti Social Behaviour. However, only 7% of all anti social behaviour incidents actually involved a crime being committed. These details were further enhanced with the information that from a sample of 1362

incidents, 315 involved school children of these 91% were alcohol related leading to inconsiderate behaviour. Also of the anti social behaviour orders held in Middlesbrough only 19% were youths (18 people) which is a low proportion of young people.

29 What the Panel found interesting was that from a questionnaire to residents, the majority of respondents considered anti social behaviour to be a concern and 47% associated teenagers hanging around as an anti social behaviour problem. Consequently 26 of the 69 current police priorities related to teenagers hanging around/anti social behaviour. The Police consider that peoples perception is influenced primarily by

- Headline cases
- The action of one person within an observed group
- The interpretation of teenagers hanging around

From the above, it is important to recognise how perception influences opinion as examples were given of harmless fun being viewed by residents as anti social behaviour

30 In conclusion, the Police conveyed that teenagers hanging around is a real problem but should not become synonymous with anti social behaviour as the majority of anti social behaviour actually related to adults. In Middlesbrough there is not a serious problem with teenagers hanging around and perception does not reflect reality. Consequently the Panel considered that the issue of perception should be an issue to address.

31 Some proposals from the Police to tackle these issues were discussed with the Panel and the following were considered a good way forward.

- Break the Friday night drink culture (inherited from adults)
- Diversionary activities
- Safe places for teenagers to meet
- Parental responsibility
- Increasing range of consequences
- Challenge perceptions

32 A range of valuable suggestions was made, which the Panel considers would contribute to tackling the issues of perception and also those elements where hanging around has influenced some anti social behaviour. In summary some key suggestions are presented as follows.

- Tackle the lethargy of some parents with an example of parents having to collect drunken teenagers and paying a parental fine.
- A video of local teenagers gathering, to be shown at a school to illustrate how such gatherings can be intimidating.
- Increased marketing that teenagers meeting friends to socially engage is not a crime.

- Consider the “Designing In” of areas within shopping developments where young people can meet safely
- Undertake direct consultation with teenagers as to what they considered the needs of teenagers
- Options of opening schools later
- Attendance of Police at all Community Council meetings to tackle the fear of crime and market good practice through councillors etc.
- To consider a position as used by Redcar & Cleveland where alcohol is not sold to under 21 year olds by off licences on Fridays or Saturdays after 6.0 PM.

Evidence from University of Teesside

- 33 The University of Teesside was asked to provide information regarding their analysis/experience of teenagers and the influences associated with teenage activities etc. The University presented detail on their research paper entitled “Street Corner Society” – Youth (Sub)culture.
- 34 The research work was undertaken in some of the poorest areas of Middlesbrough with 200 sub 16 year olds, from diverse status, who were hanging around the streets being consulted. The research focused upon how young people deal with their transition to adult hood. This research revealed that only a very small percentage of the teenagers contacted had any connection with crime. Further examination revealed that for those, who did transgress into anti social behaviour, this was frequently fuelled by the need for a thrill, which on some occasions continued into drug use, and then the cycle to fuel the habit would continue.
- 35 The University’s research concluded that for sub 16 year olds, hanging around the streets was essentially a social activity. Even with the knowledge that in general the public was addressing them negatively, while post 16 the evidence was that their attention was drawn towards Town Centre activities such as pubs and clubs. However, two groups stood out. These were young mothers and recurrently unemployed young men who both suffered from leisure poverty

Evidence from Youth Service Middlesbrough

- 36 For many years Outreach workers have engaged with other organisations to address the problems associated with young people. Over the last three years the Youth Service has increased its capacity to 18, including a full time coordinator to improve its outreach work. Recently, the outreach team has been working closely with Safe in Tees Valley, Street Wardens, drug abuse organisations and many more to support young people. The results of these endeavours have contributed to the reduction in Anti Social Behaviour and criminal damage in and around Middlesbrough. The Panel considered that the operation of outreach workers should be marketed to ensure awareness.

- 37 The Panel was presented with an outline, indicating the role of the outreach worker, which primarily falls into three categories. These being,
- ‘Outreach’ (operating from a Youth Centre and going out to engage with the community to encourage youth centre activity).
 - ‘Detached’ (not connected to a Youth Centre but actively trying to engage teenagers hanging around into certain activities).
 - ‘Mobile’ (targeted towards hot spot areas where teenagers are hanging around).

The Panel received information on three case studies, which illustrated the actual engagement, and effectiveness outreach workers are having on supporting young people and diverting their attention away from anti social behaviour issues.

- 38 The Panel was also informed that Youth Centres frequently stand empty when many teenagers are simply hanging around outside. An initiative to install ‘Pods’ for teenagers to use as congregation areas which it is hoped will move teenagers away from shop fronts on evenings as there are frequently complaints from residents about teenagers hanging around between 5 – 9.00 PM.

COMPARISONS WITH OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- 39 The Survey used by the Auditors shows that there is concern by residents across the Tees Valley and references that Middlesbrough with Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton are all in the upper quartile of residents with concerns of teenagers hanging around. However, all Tees Valley authorities are above the median and when the panel identified that there has been a significant reduction in the percentage of residents who consider vandalism/graffiti/damage to be a problem with Middlesbrough seeing the largest reduction in concern. This places into perspective that actually Middlesbrough is succeeding in tackling the actual issues of residents concerns and also the perception.
- 40 When looking at areas where New Deal for Communities is operating, a significant amount of work has been undertaken regarding teenagers hanging around. An effective task in Rochdale has been its youth tolerance zones. These are areas where young people can congregate and some noise is tolerated. The scheme aims to change the attitudes and behaviour of adults as well as young people, as it is not clear whether problems with young people hanging around are genuinely the result of youth nuisance or simply of adult intolerance.
- 41 One type of crime reduction initiative that does seem to help in tackling fear of crime is work targeted to tackle youth crime. Recent research in some New Deal for Communities areas has suggested that when youth crime falls, so do

problems with young people hanging around on the streets. In the same areas, this was matched with decreases in people feeling unsafe after dark, which is an indicator of fear of crime.

ADDRESSING THE “Terms of Reference”

42 The Panel addressed the Terms of Reference during their lines of enquiry and an outline of their findings is as follows: -

1. Explore and identify the key issues, which the Auditors considered significant in bringing this subject to Members attention.

The Panel has directly engaged with the Auditors to receive clarification on the points they raised with the Executive and also to provide evidence of the detail behind their statement.

The Panel did not find any evidence which illustrated that Middlesbrough had a problem with teenagers any different to other areas within the Tees Valley. Neither did the Panel find any evidence from other sources, which would support the emphasis placed by the Auditors regarding their comments

2. What are the links between residents feeling less well informed about the Council's actions and Teenagers hanging around and what is being undertaken to address this,

The Panel found that there was a noticeable difference between perception and reality. The perception residents may have can be fuelled through the illustrations in the media and the publicity of those incidents of teenagers and anti social behaviour. The Panel wanted to explore the actions taken to address teenagers hanging around and convey the actual position to residents, which may allay many fears.

The Panel found that there are a range of positive actions being taken by many organisations to engage with teenagers and provide support and diversionary activities. However, in many cases these direct actions, although positive, have limited publicity and primarily any publicity is associated with the service provided for teenagers etc and not marketed on the issue of teenagers hanging around. The Panel considers that greater awareness through media and marketing would assist in improving the public's perception of teenagers in Middlesbrough.

3. Are there any direct links between teenagers hanging around and anti social behaviour or is it primarily one of perception.

The Panel found that the links between teenagers hanging around and anti social behaviour to be very small and certainly not out of kilter with other Local Authority areas. The Panel was encouraged to find that the information/analysis from the Police, Teesside University, Safe in Tees Valley and the Local Authority all contributed to endorsing the Panel's findings. The Panel does appreciate that there are some links with teenagers and anti social behaviour and in the majority of cases these are hard to reach individuals. However, the Panel clearly found that the vast majority of teenagers in Middlesbrough are an emerging generation with a strong social culture, which should be supported and not tarnished by the actions of a few.

4. What is the Council or Middlesbrough Partnership doing to address this concern in either marketing or driving activities to attract teenagers away from hanging around?

The Panel found that there is a substantial amount of effort and action being taken to directly engage with teenagers. This was found to be happening through the Youth Service, the Leisure Service, Safe in Tees Valley and a range of supporting agencies. The Panel found that the whole issue of "hanging around" was one of social engagement and interaction and not something that should be feared. Although a range of diversionary activities are being provided the Panel found that these should be pursued for social reasons and to support the youth and not driven as a reaction to anti social behaviour or indeed the perceptions which surround the youth.

CONCLUSION

- 43 The Panel concluded that there are issues relating to teenagers hanging around and these can be found in any local authority. However, these concerns are primarily fuelled by perception and not reality. The Panel considers the emphasis placed by the Auditors in specifically raising this issue in its annual Audit and Inspection letter was not reflective of either a major problem with teenagers, neither is it disproportionate with other authorities within the Tees Valley.
- 44 The Panel welcomed the opportunity to examine this issue as it revealed that there is actually a very small percentage of teenagers who 'hang around' and then take part in anti social behaviour. The vast majority are law abiding and valued who hang around as a means of social engagement and interaction. The Panel considered that this is all part of growing up and while the various agencies are actively working to support the youth of Middlesbrough. Addressing the small number who fall within the hard to reach groups, who may be associated with anti social behaviour, the prime issue is one of perception.

- 45 The Panel received substantial evidence on the issue of perception against reality associated with teenagers hanging around and appreciated that the media portrayals can fuel resident's perception and how easily this is converted into fear of youths, especially on dark evenings or where large groups congregate. The Panel does not believe that a crime is being committed by teenagers, simply by hanging out together and enjoying the company of their friends. Consequently the Panel does not conclude that due to the actions of a few that the majority should be inhibited from meeting in public. The Panel does appreciate that the issue of perception must be addressed and that active publicity which clearly illustrates teenagers hanging around as a social activity while encouraging teenagers to have respect and understanding of the fears and concerns of the local community is a key factor.
- 46 The Panel also believes that further assessment should be undertaken on the changes and needs of the young in its social context. The Panel would like to see further developments in exploring further opening up of youth centres, schools and leisure facilities which accommodate the needs of the young for both social and health reasons while recognising the potential problems associated with those who may be deterred for financial reasons.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 47 The Panel's key recommendations to the Executive are as outlined below.
- A That the Executive consider the Council's Pricing Policy with the aim of allowing free access to leisure centres for teenagers. This would encourage usage and ensure the Council was taking a responsible approach to the welfare of its communities and potentially reducing incidents involving teenagers.
- B Propose an article be written for inclusion in Middlesbrough News, which raises awareness of the work outreach workers are having with teenagers.
- C To increase publicity for general awareness on the achievements in crime reduction in Middlesbrough and the evidence that the vast majority of teenagers simply congregate as a social activity.
- D Encourage the Police to explore the ability to hold a teenager who has been involved with anti social behaviour until the Parent comes to collect them. Also that the Police explore the ability to attribute a fine for this as a deterrent to future occurrences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 48 The Panel is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of our investigation. We would like to place on record our

appreciation, in particular the co-operation we have received from the following: -

C Davison	Force Youth Manager (Safe In Tees Valley)
L McDonald	Community Appraisal / Research
S Postlethwaite	Corporate Policy Manager
J Hill	Neighbourhood Safety Team Manager
D Simon	Sport and Leisure Service Manager
R Walker	Audit Commission
J Nolan	Community Safety Manager
E Chicken	Head of Community Protection
A Simpson	Chief Inspector (Middlesbrough Police)
A White	Head of Community Education
P Woods	Outreach
Dr Tracy Shildrick	University of Teesside

COUNCILLOR SHAMAL BISWAS

CHAIR OF COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LEISURE SCRUTINY PANEL

DECEMBER 2007

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 49 The following background papers were consulted or referenced to during this Scrutiny and in the compilation of this report:
- (a) Solving the Problem (Renewal.net) Re Fear / Youth and NDC
 - (b) Minutes of the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panels of 1st & 22nd August, 12th September, 3rd & 24th October, 14th November, 5th Dec - 2007