

Draft Report of

CRIME AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR TASK AND FINISH PANEL

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FOREWARD

Committee Chairman

INTRODUCTION

The Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Task and Finish Panel was formed to gain a better understanding of the levels of crime and anti-social behaviour in the District. The main issue the Council faces is that whilst crime levels in the District are low the level of fear of crime is high and the perception of young people in the District contributes to this issue. The panel believe that this review is a starting point in addressing the fear of crime and the perception of young people. This report identifies some key issues including: the need to challenge the negative perception of young people, the role of the media in forming the fear of crime and the relationship between different generations and how this contributes to the fear of crime. The scope and timing of the review did not allow the panel to look in any great detail at youth engagement and the provision of facilities for young people. And it is acknowledged that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may wish to look at these issues in more detail.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Council take an active role in promoting the positive activities which young people in the district are involved in.
2. That the Council promote the success of the Street Wardens in Bicester and Banbury and that the possibility of developing the scheme in other areas of Cherwell be investigated.
3. That Overview and Scrutiny investigate how the Council engages with young people in the District in more detail.
4. That the Council embarks on intergenerational activities to tackle the perception of crime in the District.

Role of Task and Finish Panel

Terms of Reference

- (1) To establish whether teenagers congregating on the streets are engaged in anti-social behaviour or if this is a perception.
- (2) To investigate what measures the Council has in place to engage with young people on the streets
- (3) To consider how the Council tackles any resulting anti-social behaviour.

(4) To evaluate how young people contribute to their communities and how the Council can further encourage this.

(5) To produce a report and evidence based recommendations regarding the above issues.

Membership of Panel

The Panel comprises Councillors Irvine (Chairman) Ahmed, Billington, Clarke, Cullip, Sibley, Smithson and Tompson.

The Panel greatly acknowledges the contributions and evidence freely given by:

Peta Halls (National Youth Agency)
Cherwell District Council Street Wardens
The Banbury Youth Forum
The Bicester Youth Council
Grahame Helm (Head of Safer Communities and Community Development, Cherwell District Council)
Terry Paxton (Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator, Cherwell District Council)
Jo Smith (Communications Manager, Cherwell District Council)
Jeremy Leggett (Children and Young People Services, Oxfordshire County Council)
Owen Pennock (Children and Young People Services, Oxfordshire County Council)
Pippa Martin (Arts Officer, Cherwell District Council)

Time table of meetings

Date of meeting	Who gave evidence	Issues scrutinised
5 August 2008	Grahame Helm Head of Safer Communities and Community Development Terry Paxton, Anti-social behaviour co-ordinator	Consideration of anti-social behaviour statistics Safer Communities Briefing – setting the context of anti-social behaviour in Cherwell
14 August 2008	Walkabouts with the Bicester Street Wardens	Extent to which young people are congregating on the streets
26 September 2008	Walkabouts with the Banbury Street Wardens	Extent to which young people are congregating on the streets

11 February 2009	Owen Pennock, Oxfordshire County Council Members of the Banbury Youth Forum Member of the Bicester Youth Council	Perception of young people congregating on the streets and the extent to which they are engaged in anti-social behaviour Youth engagement
21 May 2009	Bicester Youth Bus Visit Youth Workers Young people using the bus	Youth engagement
16 June 2009	Grahame Helm Councillor Dan Sames, Young People's Champion Peta Halls, Nataional Youth Agency Owen Pennock, Oxfordshire County Council Members of the Banbury Youth Forum	Roundtable discussion covering anti-social behaviour, the perception of young people and inter- generational issues Youth engagement
9 December 2009	Age Concern Banbury	Perception of young people from an older perspective Intergenerational issues

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE CONSIDERED

Video Projects Banbury Youth Forum and Bicester Youth Council, edited by Pippa Martin Arts Officer

BBC Mischief Series, Episode Three *Hoodies can be Goodies*

West Midlands Police Authority – *Listening to Young People*

Cherwell District Council (2006 and 2007) *Customer Satisfaction Results 2006 and 2007*

Audit Commission (January 2009) *Tired of Hanging Around*, Local Government National Report

Home Office (2005) *Defining and Measuring Anti- Social Behaviour*, Home Office Development and Practice

West Midlands Police Authority *Listening to Young People*

Status of Report

This report is the work of the Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Task and Finish Panel, on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and where opinions are expressed they are not necessarily those of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Cherwell District Council.

Whilst we have sought to draw on this review to make recommendations and suggestions that are helpful to the Council, our work has solely been designed for the purpose of discharging our task in accordance with the terms of reference agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Accordingly, our work cannot be relied upon to identify every area of strength, weakness or opportunity for improvement.

This report is addressed to the Executive of Cherwell District Council in the first instance. It has been prepared for the use of the Council and the Task and Finish Panel takes no responsibility for any Member or Officer acting in their individual capacities or to other third parties acting on it.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Task and Finish Panel was formed to gain a better understanding of the levels of crime and anti-social behaviour in the District. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee regularly review customer satisfaction levels which indicated that a significant proportion of residents were dissatisfied with how the Council was dealing with anti-social behaviour particularly in terms of young people congregating on the streets and graffiti. In 2006 29% of respondents were not satisfied with the Council's approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour and nuisance, this increased to 37% in 2007. The lowest levels of satisfaction in 2007 were for dealing with 'vandalism and graffiti' and 'dealing with youths hanging around on the street' both with only 14% satisfaction rating. 50% of respondents indicated that they were not satisfied with how the Council dealt with young people congregating on the streets.¹ This view is not just a Cherwell issue; the British Crime Survey 2007/08 showed that young people 'hanging around' is the greatest concern in terms on anti-social behaviour.²

As the issue of crime and anti-social behaviour is so wide the panel decided to focus on anti-social behaviour and decided to narrow the focus to young people congregating on the streets which as outlined above is an important issue to local residents.

There is evidence to indicate that people feel a sense of intimidation if they walk past a group of young people congregating outside the local shops, as confirmed by the Panel's visit to Age Concern, Banbury. The panel wanted to

¹ Cherwell District Council (2006 and 2007) *Customer Satisfaction Results 2006 and 2007*

² Audit Commission (January 2009) *Tired of Hanging Around, Local Government National Report*, www.audit-commission.gov.uk/nationalstudies/localgov

find if this sense of intimidation was justified and if young people congregating on the streets are engaged in anti-social behaviour or if this is just a perception.

Statistics relating to levels of anti-social behaviour are difficult to capture this is perhaps because anti-social behaviour has been difficult to define. The only legal definition of anti-social behaviour can be found in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 'a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as himself.'³ The House of Lords have stated that 'anti-social behaviour can take different forms and may consist of insults, abuse, threats, assaults or damage to houses by stone throwing or the painting of graffiti.' The panel found the government's view of anti-social behaviour most relevant that is: 'the common element in all anti-social behaviour is that it represents a lack of respect or consideration of other people.'⁴

Although the perception that teenagers 'hanging around' is a national issue of significant importance, data has not always been captured in national surveys. For example the Home Office '*One day count of anti-social behaviour*' 2006 did not gather information relating to young people congregating on the street. The Justice Survey found that 22% of young people aged between 10-25 admitted to at least one anti social behaviour activity in the previous 12 months but this survey also excluded data on young people congregating on the streets.⁵

Like much of the country the perception of young people congregating on the streets is an issue for residents in Cherwell, and what is or isn't antisocial behaviour is based on perception. This particularly seems to be the case with youths 'hanging around', statistics relating to anti social behaviour are difficult to gather but it seems especially so in relation to youths congregating on the streets. Hence, the panel have focused on perception. Is the idea that young people congregating on the streets are engaged in anti-social behaviour just a perception? and if so how can the Council challenge this perception?

The issue of young people congregating on the streets or 'hanging around' is a high priority across the District. Each Neighbourhood (of which there are thirteen in Cherwell) has three priorities. Only Kidlington Rural North does not include anti social behaviour and/or youths 'hanging around' as one of its community priorities. Their priorities focused on speeding which can be a key issue in rural areas. Also young people congregating on the streets tends to be less of a perceived problem in rural as compared to urban areas.

Cherwell District Council takes a major role in tackling anti-social behaviour and is a member of a multi-agency anti-social behaviour group. The Council

³ Home Office (2005) *Defining and Measuring Anti- Social Behaviour*, Home Office Development and Practice Report www.homeoffice.gov.uk

⁴ Head of Safer Communities and Community Development Briefing 5 August 2008

⁵ Audit Commission (January 2009) *Tired of Hanging Around, Local Government National Report* www.audit-commission.gov.uk/nationalstudies/localgov

has been involved in initiatives such as the Bicester Youth Bus and Youth Shelters in Banbury and Bicester, designed to tackle anti-social behaviour and engage with young people. The anti-social behaviour team has also been recognised for establishing best practice with their Anti-Social Behaviour Orders Procedures and drug house closures. In the time since the review commenced the Council has been rated as excellent by the Audit Commission the Corporate Performance Assessment recognised the Council's achievements in dealing with anti-social behaviour. The Audit Commission, in particular praised the co-ordinated response the Anti-Social Behaviour Team provides in tackling anti-social behaviour.⁶

This performance is also evident in the improving customer satisfaction results in 2009. The level of respondents not satisfied with how the Council was dealing with youths hanging around on the streets decreased to 42% and the percentage of respondents satisfied with the Council's approach increased to 19%. Overall 42% were not satisfied with the Council's approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour and nuisance with 36% satisfied with the approach. The Customer Satisfaction Survey Report 2009 stated that the lower levels of satisfaction in relation to anti-social behaviour and nuisance were not affecting the overall level of satisfaction with the Council as this was a low ranking priority as residents viewed this as a Police rather than Council function.⁷

The Council's Anti-Social Behaviour team have identified several challenges in dealing with young people and anti-social behaviour these are: understanding the needs of young people, effective engagement with Oxfordshire Youth Service and managing expectations as well as ensuring clear information gathering. The team also recognises the need to promote their work in terms of the initiatives they are involved in and successes in terms of developing best practice, which in turn will help alter public perception.

A disproportionate number of youths entering the criminal justice system in Oxfordshire are from Cherwell at a third. It is a priority of the Council's anti-social behaviour team to intervene before anti-social behaviour escalates into criminal activity. Most reports of anti-social behaviour are in the urban centres of Banbury Bicester and Kidlington. The panel have therefore focused the review on these areas.

⁶ Audit Commission (March 2009) *Annual Report and Inspection Letter 2009*
www.cherwell.gov.uk

⁷ Cherwell District Council Customer 2009 *Satisfaction Survey Report* (p 36)
<http://intranet/corporatepolicy/Researchreports.cfm>

The table below shows the level of anti-social behaviour in the district.

Complaint Type	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Abandoned Vehicles	1997	1696	892	757
Anti social behaviour	306	542	565	467
Dog fouling	117	67	61	90
Fly Tipping	600	749	495	616
Graffiti	24	28	21	6
Littering	308	393	286	N/A
Noise	454	368	399	748

FINDINGS

Walkabout with the Street Wardens

The Street Wardens Scheme was originally set up in 2001. Street Wardens, carry out patrols, attend community meetings and support Thames Valley Police with information and intelligence. Their responsibilities include:

- reporting fly tipping, abandoned or untaxed vehicles and other waste related issues
- promoting recycling and advising to residents
- assisting the dog warden with stray dogs and other related issues
- wardens are trained and equipped to deal with needles and drugs related litter
- assisting Leisure Services to promote events.
- Wardens are also trained walk leaders for the health walk scheme.

The Street Wardens are also engaging with young people. The Audit Commission described the Cherwell Street Wardens as 'highly visible' in the community.⁸ The Panel undertook walkabouts with the Street Wardens in Bicester and Banbury to see for themselves if young people were congregating on the street or being anti-social.

Councillor Sibley went on a walkabout with the Street Wardens in Bicester on Thursday 14 August 2008. The objective of the walkabout was to investigate the first term of reference of the task and finish panel which was: to establish whether teenagers congregating on the streets are engaged in anti social behaviour or if this is perception. The walkabout focused on the Bure Park area of Bicester where issues relating to anti-social behaviour had been

⁸ Audit Commission (March 2009) *Annual Report and Inspection Letter 2009*
www.cherwell.gov.uk

reported in the past. In the time Councillor Sibley was with the Street Wardens there was no evidence of young people congregating on the streets.

Councillor Sibley identified that there was a lack of facilities for young people in the area and learned about the role of the Street Wardens, in reporting vandalism and anti-social behaviour, dealing with resident's complaints, and communicating with local schools. Councillor Sibley reported to the Panel and highlighted the success of the street wardens in Bicester and the value of their role in terms of: high visibility, involvement with the community, pro-active approach with engaging local schools and knowledge of young people in the area.

The street wardens were able to offer their own insight into the issue of anti social youths. The wardens felt it was a perception that young people congregating were engaged in anti-social behaviour. It was acknowledged by the wardens that large groups of young people could be intimidating to people, especially when accessing facilities such as local shops. When the street wardens had spoken to young people congregating together the general explanation was that there was no where else for them to go.



Councillors Culip and Smithson went on a walkabout with Street Wardens in Banbury on Friday 26 September 2008. In the time the Councillors were in Grimsbury with the street wardens there was no evidence of young people congregating on the streets or engaged in anti-social behaviour. In their time with the Street Wardens the Councillors saw young people engaged in normal

activities during the walkabout: getting conkers from trees, going to the park to play football etc.

The Street Wardens had explained that they had experienced instances of young people engaging in anti-social behaviour in Banbury but not to the extent reported in the media. They felt the idea of young people congregating on the streets and engaging in anti-social behaviour was very much a perception as opposed to a reality.



The Street Wardens were also discussed by the Panel with members of the Banbury Youth Forum. Members of the panel and the Audit Commission had praised the work of the Street Wardens and recognised the value of the visibility on the community and their role as a deterrent to anti-social behaviour. The young people saw the Street Wardens in a different light and felt they would be ineffectual in dealing with the issue of anti-social behaviour and specifically young people congregating on the streets. The Street Wardens themselves expressed their own concerns relating to young people congregating on the streets and were aware that although their presence alone could help disperse large groups of young people congregating this would not stop them returning once the Street Wardens shifts had ended.

The findings of the Budget Consultation 2009 supports the young people's view of the Street Wardens, local residents stated that they were not aware of what the Street Wardens were responsible for and that they had 'no respect from the community of kids.' The issues identified in the budget consultation were around knowledge and experience of the Street Wardens, that is, residents taking part in the budget consultation were not aware of what the Street Wardens did and what they could do.⁹

⁹ Cherwell District Council (2009) *Budget Consultation Report 2009* (p 22)
<http://intranet/corporatepolicy/Researchreports.cfm>

It appears that despite their visibility the Street Wardens are not perceived to be effective in tackling youths congregating on the streets by local residents. However, the Councillors who spent time with the Street Wardens felt they did have an impact and played an important role in the community. The perception of the Street Wardens success and effectiveness can be linked to the general perception of anti-social behaviour and youths congregating on the streets. If it is a perception that young people congregating on the streets are engaged in anti-social behaviour then the Street Wardens success cannot be judged in terms of dealing with this as it is a perception not a real problem.

The panel felt that the Street Wardens were a valuable tool in tackling anti-social behaviour and nuisance and felt that the possibility of extending the scheme to other parts of the District should be investigated. However their success and impact in tackling anti-social behaviour needed to be promoted in the community so that local residents were more aware of their role and responsibilities and how this relates to reducing anti-social behaviour, or its' perception.

Recommendation

That the Council promote the success of the Street Wardens in Bicester and Banbury and that the possibility of developing the scheme in other areas of Cherwell is investigated.



Banbury Youth Forum and Bicester Youth Council Video Projects

The Panel invited the Banbury Youth Forum and Bicester Youth Council to produce video projects on their perspectives of anti social behaviour with particular focus on the first and second terms of reference of the panel: (1) to establish whether teenagers congregating on the streets are engaged in anti-social behaviour or if this is a perception and (2) to investigate what measures the Council has in place to engage with young people on the streets.

Members of the Panel visited the groups to explain the purpose of the review and how their perspective would contribute to a balanced investigation into the issue of young people congregating on the streets. The perspective of older residents had been clearly established in the results of the Council's customer satisfaction results which inspired this review, as outlined earlier in the report.

The Banbury Youth Forum and Bicester Youth Council took similar approaches to their projects interviewing young people in their areas. The Banbury Youth Forum met with young people in Banbury who were congregating in areas of the town and the Bicester Youth Forum interviewed young people using the Bicester Youth Bus.

The videos highlighted that some of the activities that may appear intimidating to local residents were viewed by the young people as normal social activities. For example in the interviews congregating in a shopping precinct was explained as playing football in an area which was well lit and sheltered. Skateboarding in a shopping centre was viewed as better than causing trouble and drinking. Many of the interviewees identified a lack of facilities and a lack of 'things to do' in the district as a reason for young people congregating in public places.

The young people interviewed by the Bicester Youth Council praised the Bicester Youth Bus and felt this type of facility would prevent teenagers from congregating on the streets but also commented that it needed to be better publicised to ensure teenagers were aware such a facility existed. They also highlighted that young people often congregated around places such as shopping precincts and centres because they were well lit and sheltered. In the discussion following the video presentation (which members of the Banbury Youth Forum attended) the young people gave examples of facilities in the district which would take young people off the streets but which were not lit at certain times. One of the interviewee's in Bicester stated that he felt more safe in a big City such as Oxford as it was busier in the evening, there was more going on and cities are well lit. The young people also gave examples of being dispersed by the police; they felt this was unreasonable in public places such as parks, and this was the type of location that larger groups should be allowed to socialise and congregate in.

The video projects also highlighted that young people themselves shared the feeling of intimidation caused by teenagers congregating on the streets and that concerns relating to anti-social behaviour were not only concerns of adult residents in the district. Interestingly in the West Midlands Police Authority

Report Listening to Young People, young people identified teenagers hanging around as a priority in terms of antisocial behaviour problems. They also advised that better street lighting and more visible police presence in anti social areas could make a difference.¹⁰

Both groups tackled the idea that young people congregating in the streets are engaged in anti-social behaviour is a perception. Young people in Bicester felt that this perception was created as teenagers are being stereotyped. The members of the Banbury Youth Forum who met with the Panel supported this view and felt that the media had played a role in creating this inaccurate and damaging stereotype of teenagers. The representatives from the Banbury Youth Forum explained that when making their video project they had struggled to find young people congregating on the streets and in their view none of the young people they met had been engaged in anti-social behaviour. Both groups stated they felt young people were 'hanging around' because they had nothing to do; the vast majority were not engaged in antisocial behaviour.

This input from young people in the review caused the Panel to consider if the behaviour of young people today is significantly different to that of previous generations, members of the panel felt that they had been 'mischievous' in the past but their behaviour had never been labelled as anti-social.

It is clear each generation has a distinct youth culture. Is the behaviour of 'hoodies' any different to other youth cultures of the past such as: teddy boys, mods and punks, a view also considered in the BBC documentary '*Hoodies can be Goodies*'.¹¹ Whilst, the language, activities and fashion trends of young people are different to that of previous generations the Panel considered that the core desire to be around friends to associate with a group had not changed. It is possible the language and fashion trends are undoubtedly different and may cause inter-generational tensions, which contribute to a perception that associates 'hoodies' and 'hanging around' with anti-social behaviour. This view is supported by the West Midlands Police Authority Report, Listening to Young People. The report authors young people who 'repeatedly said that the media and public perceptions of young people were generally negative, focusing on young people as anti-social and involved in gangs. Young people felt this stereotypical portrayal helped to maintain and provoke inter-generational tensions'.¹²

Members of the Banbury Youth Forum made the first link in the panel's investigation between this perception of young people and the media. They had grown up in a culture where language was different to that of previous generations and where swearing was common, on TV, in video games and music. The view was expressed that the media plays a role in creating the

¹⁰ West Midlands Police Authority *Listening to Young People* (p. 11) <http://www.west-midlands-pa.gov.uk/publicconsultationpublications.asp>

¹¹ BBC (October 2008) *Hoodies can be Goodies* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00dnf0p>

¹² West Midlands Police Authority *Listening to Young People* (p 11) <http://www.west-midlands-pa.gov.uk/publicconsultationpublications.asp>

current youth culture which it at times vilifies. Although young people were able to make this link between the role of the media and this harmful perception of young people they could not offer any concrete suggestions to the panel on how to challenge and correct this perception.

It is worth noting that the negative image of young people has been magnified during a period where the roles of the media has been changing. The media has grown with more television channels, newspapers and the growth of the internet. The messages that the media promotes are more widely available and easier to access. The public access reports relating to knife crime and anti-social behaviour involving young people from across the country and this shapes their perception of young people where they live. Residents' in Cherwell perceptions of young people are shaped by events in places like Birmingham or London as opposed to Cherwell where incidents of anti-social behaviour are rare.

Members of the Banbury Youth Forum explained to the Panel that they felt the positive activities that young people were involved in were often overlooked and that the media were eager to report only negative news stories involving young people. This view is shared by the young people the West Midlands Police Authority consulted, their report found that the positive activities of young people should be promoted and celebrated.¹³ The panel have concluded that it is mainly perception that young people congregating on the streets in Cherwell are engaged in anti-social behaviour. The panel believe that this negative stereotype of young people should be challenged and that the Council should take a lead role in challenging this misconception.

Recommendation

That the Council take an active role in promoting the positive activities which young people in the District are involved in.

Intergenerational Issues

The relationship between young and older generations in the District has been a recurring theme of this review. As the panel undertook their investigation the link to intergenerational tensions and the negative perception of young people became more prominent. The Banbury Youth Forum felt that there was a lack of understanding between different generations and that young people were unfairly blamed for the negative actions of all young people and that their behaviour was automatically labelled as anti-social even though in their view their behaviour was acceptable.

¹³ West Midlands Police Authority *Listening to Young People* (p 11) <http://www.west-midlands-pa.gov.uk/publicconsultationpublications.asp>

At the roundtable discussion it was suggested that intergenerational activities can be successful in challenging the negative perception of young people and uniting communities. Members of the panel visited Age Concern in Banbury to understand how older people perceived young people and how it contributed to their understanding of crime in the District.

The general view of the residents interviewed was that there was not a problem with young people congregating on the streets although some did admit at times to feeling intimidated when they saw a group of young people congregating. Many residents expressed that 'young people were no different to how we were' and that the behaviour of young people today was not 'any worse' to that of older generations. Those interviewed felt that there was a lack of facilities for young people and that activities for young people were not as prominent as they once were. One resident gave the example of the Scouts or Boys Brigade and it was felt that institutions like this were not as popular or accessible as they once had been.

Although the older residents claimed that they did not think there was a problem with young people engaging in anti-social behaviour in the District they did mention problems with vandalism. In the course of discussion the interviewees did use negative language when talking about young people despite earlier stating that they felt that there was not a problem with young people and that their behaviour was no worse than any other generation. Many of the older people talked about a change in society generally and felt that young people showed a lack of respect towards adults. They felt that communities interacted in a different way and that young people were influenced more by computer games which they felt portrayed violence.

Customers at Age Concern felt that the media did shape their perception of young people and that the media had a 'lot to answer for.' They felt that there was a barrier between young and old but this had also been the case when they were younger and their parents didn't understand their interests of musical tastes etc. The idea of more intergenerational activities was well received and it was felt that generations could learn from one another and that this was vital to develop trust and challenge negatives perceptions of young people. Peta Halls, from the National Youth Agency, provided the panel with examples of where intergenerational activities had been successful in tackling the perception of anti-social behaviour

Case Study – Corby

Corby also suffers from intergenerational problems similar to those discussed above. A low level of tolerance in terms of anti-social behaviour was identified in the area which contributed towards a culture of blame from the older generation towards young people causing tension in the community.

Northamptonshire Police conducted a community audit in Corby which showed anti-social behaviour and criminal damage was a major concern in the community highlighted by (90% of participants). The audit allowed the Police to identify what residents perceived as the problems with anti-social

behaviour and young people such as: lack of facilities boredom, lack of role models. The audit identified that people wanted to see more youth workers on the streets and CCTV cameras.

The results of the audit resulted in the securing of funding for two detached youth workers who were able to engage with young people effectively. The scheme was successful in reducing anti-social behaviour with a 39% reduction in the number of anti-social behaviour incidents reported in the area between December 2007 and February 2008 compared to the same period in the previous year. Youth workers were able to engage with young people in an informal manner and gave older residents the opportunity to express their concerns relating to young people. Youth workers provided feedback from in relation to these concerns through presentations to local community groups, newsletters and media reports.

Information Provided by Peta Hall Development Officer - Community Safety and Youth Justice, National Youth Agency.

Case Study – Conka Island Birmingham

Conka Island is a grass area in Birmingham about 150 metres long and 75 metres wide. Police were receiving complaints about nuisance and anti-social behaviour in and around the area. Young people were blamed for trouble in the area and the decision had been taken to apply for a dispersal order. This was put on hold and young people were approached to take part in a consultation process. Young people drafted a questionnaire for local residents to identify their concerns regarding the area.

Through this intergeneration work a bid for lottery funding was made and improvements were made to the island such as litter bins, fences, benches and an outdoor football area. The project was successful in bringing the community together. Police no longer respond to complaints to move young people on which only served to antagonise young people and did not resolve the anti-social behaviour issues. The young people no longer congregate in areas which caused a nuisance and have got involved in environmental projects in conka island. The area is recognised as a place for young people to meet and use.

Information Provided by Peta Hall Development Officer - Community Safety and Youth Justice, National Youth Agency.

Although these case studies give successful examples of dealing with anti-social behaviour particularly in terms of a 'community' approach and inter-generational working the situation in Cherwell are distinct from those faced in Corby and Birmingham. Cherwell has low level of crime and incidents of anti-social behaviour caused by young people are way below those experienced at Corby and Birmingham. However, intergenerational tensions do contribute to the negative perception of young people which in turn contribute to the fear of

crime. Intergenerational tensions can fuel the perception that young people are engaged in anti-social behaviour and add to the feeling of distrust. The panel has found little evidence of young people congregating on the streets or being engaged in anti-social behaviour. It is of paramount importance that the Council deals with the issue of perception.

The panel recognise the importance of engaging with young people and including the whole community in projects. The panel discussed the possibility of the council initiating youth projects where young people would be given responsibility and ownership for delivering activities for young people. The panel decided this warrants further investigation.

The case studies demonstrate that intergenerational activities can be successful in challenging the negative perception of young people and creating greater community cohesion and the panel felt that this should be explored.

Recommendation

That the Council embarks on intergenerational activities to tackle the perception of crime in the District.

Bicester Youth Bus Visit

Councillors Billington and Tompson visited the Bicester Youth Bus (a project the Council is involved in). The Bicester Youth Bus is in effect a 'mobile youth centre' that tours locations in and around Bicester. The Youth Bus provides access to computers and the opportunity for young people to take part in a variety of projects. Youth workers are available on the Youth Bus for information and guidance on issues such as: sexual health, drugs, alcohol, relationships and education.



The Councillors met with Youth Workers who work on the bus and some of the young people who use the bus. The bus was established and is funded by a partnership of organisations including Cherwell District Council, Bicester

Town Council, the Police, Oxfordshire County Council youth service and Bicester Village. The bus is presently available for young people twice a week on a Thursday at Shakespeare Road and Wednesday at Bure Park from 6.30pm – 9.00pm. If there were no staff vacancies the bus would be open Monday – Thursday evenings. The Bicester Youth Bus provides a valuable alternative to traditional methods of youth engagement and allows an opportunity for youth workers to establish relationships with young with more flexibility as the bus goes to the young people rather than them having to attend a youth centre. The Bus provides a safe place for young people to meet and has had a positive impact on taking young people off the street. The Panel discussed the possibility of the scheme being extended to cover Banbury and since it has been announced that Banbury would also be getting a youth bus, the Panel commends the decision to do this.

In the 2009 Budget Consultation residents suggested that more information on the Youth Bus should be published as they were not aware of the bus and how the Youth Bus was helping to addresses the perception of anti-social behaviour.¹⁴ This highlights further the need for the Council to actively promote its role in successfully dealing with anti-social behaviour and the services it provides for young people.



¹⁴ Cherwell District Council (2009) *Budget Consultation Report 2009* (p 23)
<http://intranet/corporatepolicy/Researchreports.cfm>

Roundtable Discussion

The Panel hosted a round table discussion attended by Peta Halls (National Youth Agency) Grahame Helm (Head of Safer Communities and Community Development) Jo Smith (Communications Manager) Councillor Dan Sames (Young People's Champion) Owen Pennock (Oxfordshire County Council) and Members of the Banbury Youth Forum.

The panel discussed the role of the local media, the importance of engaging with the local press and promoting programmes for young people to be involved in. It was felt that it was not always true that the local media hold a negative perception of young people and that this tends on the whole to be a view of the national press, the local press tend to be very supportive of their communities. The Panel felt that the local media could be a successful outlet for promoting the activities of the Council in dealing with anti-social behaviour and for promoting the positive activities young people in the District were involved in.

The panel were advised that most of the anti-social behaviour in the district was not caused just by young people. Most anti-social behaviour and criminal damage is by adults and tends to occur late in the evening when pubs and clubs are closing, and is linked to exit rates from the urban centres and not at the times when young people tend to congregate. The panel commented that this was an important message to communicate to local residents in challenging the perception that young people congregating on the streets are engaged in anti-social behaviour.

The negative perception that young people are involved in anti-social behaviour has taken years to develop through this use of negative language and an image of young people built by the media which it is felt plays on the fears of older residents. The panel commented that this negative image is deep rooted and has developed over time. Challenging this perception will therefore, need to be an ongoing project and there is no quick fix to dealing with this stereotype. It has taken years to build a perception and it will take years to change it.

The Panel discussed how the Council engages with young people and how this can be improved. The Panel considered the use of social networking sites and web pages specifically designed for young people. The Panel recognise that this is a large topic which goes beyond the terms of reference of the Panel and so therefore the request Overview and Scrutiny Committee investigate the possibility of a more detailed review into youth engagement in the district.

Recommendation

That Overview and Scrutiny investigate how the Council engages with young people in the District in more detail.

CONCLUSION

The main conclusion of this review is that there is not a problem with young people congregating on the streets in Cherwell and that the majority of those congregating are not engaged in anti-social behaviour. However, a negative perception of young people does exist in the District and that this contributes to the fear of crime. It is extremely difficult to pinpoint where this negative perception originates and even those who hold these views had great difficulty in explaining how these views are formed. Young people themselves felt prejudiced by a negative perception could offer no easy solutions on how to challenge the perception. The Panel is clear that the negative perception of young people has taken years to build and that there will be no 'quick-fix' to challenging this view of young people but this should not deter the Council from taking every opportunity to challenge it through positive reinforcement and breaking down intergenerational barriers.