

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

03 February, 2003

(18:35 - 21:55)

Present: Councillor Smith (Chair), Councillors Barnes, Mrs Holiday, Jones, Coleman, Seacome, Mrs Hale, Mrs Ledoux, Morris, Wheeler, Mrs Driver, Mrs Regan, Mrs Moreton, Mr Howard, Mr Sygerycz, Mr Moore-Scott

Also attended: Chris Huckle, Tim Evans, Sonia Phillips, Rita Baker, Stefan Wathan, Lucy Cape Kim Gibbons, Laura Graham, Clare Wood, and David Hodgetts representing the MAD young people's council for agenda item 7.

Karen Robinson representing Connexions, Eric Radnidge representing the Gloucestershire County Council Youth and Community Service, Calvin Williams representing the Gloucestershire Council for Voluntary Youth Service, and David Groom representing the Youth Offending Service all for agenda item 7.

1. Apologies

Councillors Mrs Bishop, Stennett, Lloyd and Mr Bullingham (Tenants' Federation),

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Mrs Regan declared an interest as the Chair for the POD at Brizen Recreation. Councillors Mrs Moreton and Mrs Hale declared an interest as members of the MAD Young People's Council.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 06 January, 2003 were approved as a correct record with the exception of a comment by Councillor Mrs Regan in minute 9 on page 8. This should not have referred to personal safety issues, and should read "Councillor Mrs. Regan commented that the POD at the Brizen Recreation provided an additional link to the detached youth workers".

4. Public Questions and Petitions

No public questions or petitions had been received.

5. Matters referred to Committee

(a) By Council - No items received.

(b) By Cabinet - No items received.

(c) By Area Committee - No items received.

6. Leisure Management Contract update

This update report was provided as an enclosure circulated with the agenda by Sonia Phillips Assistant Director Health and Well Being and Lucy Cape, Sport and Leisure Development Manager

The Chair confirmed that there were no questions and thanked Sonia Phillips and Lucy Cape, for the report.

7. Review of agenda for young people

Stefan Wathan, Community and Youth Development Manager presented this report which set out the strategic framework within which the council operated its agenda for young people and how it complemented the work of key partners and partnerships. The aim of the

report was to demonstrate the progress that had been made against objectives and principles and highlight successes as well as the challenges for the future.

The Community and Youth Development Manager advised the committee that the presentation was divided into five sections which covered the overall strategy for young people and its four objectives presented by guest speakers.

The strategy for young people was developed in 1997 with the document 'Investment in young people; a strategic framework' which helped to ensure that Cheltenham Borough Council was in touch with the demands that their partners faced. This was followed in 2001 with 'Right here, right now', a strategy for young people, which had four objectives: to empower young people; to advise, inform and listen to young people; to maximise facilities and opportunities; to ensure the safety of young people.

Outside speakers were invited to address the committee on each objective.

To empower young people

The Community and Youth Development Manager invited representatives from the MAD youth council to inform the committee of the work they carried out. Kim Gibbons, Laura Graham, David Hodgetts and Greg Howard gave an informative presentation on the achievements and plans for the future role of the young people's council.

They advised that MAD stood for 'Making A Difference', that the council had thirteen members, and that over the last four years fifty young people had been involved from a number of schools and youth organisations representing 11 - 19 year olds. Council members visited schools and communicated through the website, email and shout cards. A computer and software had been purchased capable of editing videos. The production of a three minute video was planned to promote the work of the MAD young people's council.

If this was successful a twenty minute production would follow dealing with drugs education, and focusing on citizenship, communication, team work, rights and responsibilities, learning life skills, and the work of local government.

The MAD young people's council had worked in partnership with Connexions in Gloucestershire and had succeeded in raising the profile of MAD. This had been achieved through surveys and questionnaires, proof of age cards, annual reports at national and local level, and on the UN convention on the rights of the child. They had highlighted the need for skate parks, reductions in bus fares for over 16's who have to pay the same fares as eighteen year olds, and had campaigned for a reduction in the age of eligibility to vote. More venues for the 14 - 17 year olds to enjoy activities were needed for evenings, weekends and holidays.

The Chair thanked the members of the MAD young people's council for their presentations and asked for questions from the committee.

Councillor Morris asked what would improve the work of the youth service and what kind of services the borough council needed to improve to get things done.

The Community and Youth Development Manager advised that the target was to involve more people and work with more organisations, to increase co-operation with the Youth Service, and to arrange weekends away with other councils. He said that there was always room for improvement and it had been a good start.

Councillor Seacome asked about the young people that MAD did not reach and whether more resources were required to achieve this.

The Community and Youth Development Manager advised that the young people's council relied upon volunteers who were more committed and wanted to be involved. There were more visits to schools, youth clubs, faith and church groups taking place, and through joint projects with Connexions there was guidance on drugs and support. More people needed to get involved and a few years of further development was required, but it would be unrealistic to expect the Youth Council to achieve what the statutory agencies had failed to do.

Councillor Barnes asked if there were plans to recruit more young people who were disadvantaged and generally motivate the youth of deprived areas.

The Community and Youth Development Manager advised that MAD does not see its role in this light, but confirmed that MAD members came from all walks of life.

David Hodgetts suggested that it was as important for adults to understand the needs of young people, as it was for young people to understand adults.

Councillor Mrs Driver congratulated the members of MAD for their lively presentation and asked if bullying and drugs in Cheltenham schools were a problem.

In response Laura Graham advised that with government initiatives bullying was not a major problem locally, but drugs were causing problems. MAD helped inform of the dangers, of drug abuse but left decisions to the individual. Grapevine and other organisations also dealt with drug abuse and education.

Councillor Mrs Moreton congratulated MAD on their work and stated that it was the responsibility of the borough council to build upon these foundations and encourage more young people to get involved.

The Chair asked how effective lowering the voting age in local and national elections would be in encouraging 16 -17 year olds to vote.

David Hodgetts advised that if young people could vote then they would think that they could make a difference. More consultation and information was needed, by councillors and members of parliament.

The Chair asked whether it would help if councillors were to visit schools and make presentations to the 14 -17 year olds.

David Hodgetts confirmed that this would help and young people would feel that their views were important and were being listened to.

The Chair asked members of MAD, if there was one issue they could change in Cheltenham what it would be.

In response the members advised that there should be a reduction in the cost of bus fares, more venues and activities for 14-17 year olds, more informed political education, and cheaper sporting facilities.

The Chair thanked the members of MAD for their contribution to the meeting and said that the committee had learnt a great deal from the information presented.

To advise inform and listen to young people

The Community and Youth Development Manager introduced Karen Robinson from Connexions who presented this aspect of the strategic objectives.

Karen Robinson advised the committee that the Connexions vision was to provide the information, advice, support and guidance needed to help all young people aged between 13-19 in the county to achieve their full potential. The aim was to raise aspirations of young people to lift achievement levels, remove barriers to achievement, and develop partnership networks. She outlined the work and achievements of Connexions, and the next steps.

The Chair asked for questions from the committee.

Councillor Morris asked how Connexions linked with local schools; Karen Robinson advised that their work concentrated on working with young people and not with the managing structure of the school. They worked with forty two secondary schools in the county and with Gloucestershire Secondary Heads. They had made presentations to some school governors. She advised that there was a training programme for personal advisors who learned to interact with young people. The overriding aim was that the professional practice was driven by the needs of young people.

Councillor Mrs Moreton asked how Connexions handled confidentiality issues in relation to child protection issues.

Karen Robinson advised that the personal advisers made it clear that the information provided belonged to the young person. This rule would only be overridden in child protection cases when it was for the good of the young person and support was given.

The Chair asked how Connexions ensured their agenda was driven by local young people when there were government imposed targets.

Karen Robinson advised that Connexions was government funded and therefore had to address the national agenda, but this was seen as a halfway house with young people telling them what they wanted, with open dialogue.

Councillor Mrs Regan asked how many members were working in Gloucestershire, and did each personal advisor have a budget.

Karen Robinson advised that there were 40-50 personal advisors in Gloucestershire plus trained youth and community staff who were also able to respond as personal advisors. The personal advisors did not have individual budgets.

Mr Sygerycz asked how contact and support was maintained with disabled young people after they had left school.

Karen Robinson advised that those with disabilities did get involved with voluntary services and Disability Action in Cheltenham and they did keep in touch through the Cheltenham Connexions project.

Councillor Morris asked for clarification on funding by Social Services and what new money had been allocated by government.

Karen Robinson advised that the budget available to Connexions in Gloucestershire was greater than that previously allocated than to the careers advisory service.

The Chair thanked Karen Robinson for her presentation.

To maximise facilities and opportunities

The Community and Youth Development Manager introduced Eric Radnige and Calvin Williams who presented this item.

The presentation advised that the provision of quality services was crucial to young people and the extent to which they were met was largely dependant on the influence that young people had. Active lifestyles were encouraged through ensuring equality of access to facilities and a range of opportunities to help all aspects of the social development of young people and to promote community spirit. The presentation outlined the work that had been carried out and the objectives for future development.

The Chair asked, at what point young people were involved at the strategic level to influence decisions in the way that MAD and Connexions were able to demonstrate. Mr Radnige advised that participation was achieved by engaging young people in committees and by their input to management reports.

Councillor Morris asked how the service could extend its client base to include young children as the service appeared to be pre-occupied with the 14-24 age group.

Mr Radnige advised that the national priority was the 13-19 age group which attracted eighty percent of the Youth and Community Service Group funding. The balance of funding was used on either side of this age group.

The Community and Youth Development Manager advised that Tewkesbury Borough Council funded the 10-13 age group, but Cheltenham Borough Council did not.

Councillor Morris said that more money was spent in Gloucester than Cheltenham, and asked what had happened to the £40,000 saving made from the closure of Northlands. Mr Radnige advised that the Northlands closure now funded a street based appointment, with support budget and an office base.

Councillor Mrs Regan stated that it had been reported in the Echo that the savings from Northlands had been allocated to a central fund and would not be used locally. As chair of the POD at Brizen Recreation she had seen a great deal of good work achieved, but this was not the case in the Reddings area. The double decker bus youth facility was off the road, and there was no alternative venue for teenagers in the area.

Mr Radnige advised that there was no extra funding at the moment and none available in this year. There was no budget for the upkeep of the bus, so extra funding was required.

The Chair asked what budget was required to get the bus back on the road. Mr Radnige stated that he did not have a figure, but he could advise the Community and Youth Development Manager if this was needed. He added that a double decker bus facility was not the ideal venue for youth activities and confirmed that there were street based workers in the Reddings area.

Mr Sygerycz asked how disabled people were able to access the bus, and whether young people could avail themselves of new technology, for example amateur radio such as M3. He also asked if it was a policy to reward offenders with adventure experiences that normal law abiding young people may not have access to.

Mr Radnige confirmed that the double decker bus did not have wheelchair access, and this was one of the reasons that it was not an ideal venue. Amateur radio facilities had not been considered so far. There was no policy to reward young offenders with holidays, but research had shown that a range of measures were needed to deal with young offenders,

including in a small number of cases taking youngsters away from their home environment and involving them in challenging youth work in a group and in character building exercises.

Councillor Mrs Driver asked why Northlands was closed.

Mr Radnige in response stated that this had been a political decision and he was therefore unable to comment.

In response to Mr. Moore-Scott, he informed the committee that there had been a large amount of arts development work carried out, which included setting up a recording studio at Whaddon with other initiatives planned. The Community and Youth Development Manager reminded members that an Arts Development Officer was to be funded by the borough council.

The Chair thanked Mr Radnige and Mr Williams for their presentation and contribution.

The Community and Youth Development Manager commented that a huge amount of work had been done by the Youth Service in Cheltenham and that they fulfilled a very important role. He urged members to concentrate on what they did, rather than on perceived gaps in the service.

To ensure the safety of young people

The Community and Youth Development Manager introduced David Groom, Operations Manager of the Youth Offending Service who presented this item.

The presentation advised that young people were both victims and perpetrators of crime but in both cases it was only a minority of the total child or young people population that was affected. The fear of crime is common to all young people and its impact affected lives directly and indirectly. Young people needed to feel safe and have the confidence in the services which could improve their quality of life. The presentation outlined the work that had been carried out including anti social behaviour orders and the objectives for future development and partnerships. The Youth Offending Service worked with offenders to change their outlook on life through themselves, family and victims. This was achieved through a programme of screening, peer pressure, skills training and constructive use of leisure time.

The Youth Offending Services objective was to eliminate or reduce crime in partnership with trained volunteers and Connexions. Research showed that following contact with the Youth Offending Service, one third of offenders did not re-offend, one third re-offended, but not as seriously, and one third re-offended more persistently and seriously. It was important to listen to the individual needs of young offenders.

In April 2003 inter-agency panels would be established where children within the 5-13 age group who were highlighted by parents, teachers or other organisations as having behavioural problems could be referred for assessment. The child would be given support as required.

The Chair asked for questions from the committee.

Councillor Mrs Moreton stated that she was alarmed by the concept of a children's panel as young people could be brought before the panel by coercion which could have a lasting damaging impact on the child.

Mr Groom explained that the panel was a central government initiative and there was still much work to be done. He disagreed with the anxieties expressed, and believed that

further work would address the concerns of how a child was identified as at risk. It was intended that this would be on a voluntary basis with additional support for those involved. Councillor Mrs Moreton commented that there was a danger of children been picked out based on an opinion, so those from different backgrounds would be treated unfairly.

Councillor Mrs Driver asked how 5-13 year olds offenders' parents would be helped if needed.

Mr Groom stated that parents were also responsible and in those cases they would be helped. In many cases it was the parents who asked for help with their child, it was only a minority who were not interested.

Mr Groom advised that the Youth Offending Service role, was to help head up the initiative and to draw up the definition of 'at risk.' The panel initiative for 5-13 year olds was seen as an opportunity not a problem.

Councillor Mrs Hale expressed concern that this may affect single parent families with young offender children, and asked if anything would be done to redress the balance for this age group of 5-13.

Mr Groom advised that research had not identified that young offenders were predominantly from single parent families or did not do as well. There was potential for mentors and role models to be established.

Mr Howard asked how the service dealt with the one third of offenders who re-offended.

Mr Groom advised that they would look at what had been done incorrectly, start afresh and establish a link by listening to the offender.

The Chair thanked Mr Groom for his presentation and contribution and asked the Community and Youth Development Manager for his summary.

The Community and Youth Development Manager recommended that a working group of members of the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee, partners and users be formed to review the existing strategy for young people, the key challenges identified within the report and the council's priorities with regard to the future agenda for young people. The working group should aim to report back to the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2003, in readiness for the 2004-2005 budget setting process.

Summary

The Chair suggested the working group should consist of CBC's youth spokespersons Councillors Coleman, Mrs Moreton, Mrs Hale, and Stefan Wathan the Community and Youth Development Manager. They would report back in September 2003 to review financial and resource implications.

The Chair recommended keeping the working group to a manageable size, but other stakeholders plus users could also be involved. The Committee agreed to the establishment of a working group along the lines proposed.

Councillor Mrs Driver asked why the review of the Agenda for Young People was restricted to only a few councillors on this committee. As it was such an important issue, all forty councillors should have been involved.

The Chair stated that all councillors had received the agenda papers, so it was a pity that there was not a greater attendance.

He added in response to one of the MAD suggestions that involvement with schools in the borough by members was a good idea and asked if the committee was in agreement. Councillor Morris stated that he agreed as long as it presented a balanced view of the Council.

The Director, Social and Community suggested that to avoid any misinterpretation of members' motives and to allow officer resources to be identified a letter could be sent by the Managing Director via the Democratic Services Unit to secondary schools in the Borough.

The Chair thanked all for attending and closed the meeting at 21:55 hours.

Date of Next Meeting - 5 March 2003

**Councillor D. Smith
Chairman**