

Select Committee on Community Safety and Community Services – 21st January 2010

Report of the Chief Executive

Operation Staysafe in Dudley

Purpose of Report

1. To inform members of the Select Committee of the development and implementation of Operation Staysafe within Dudley since July 2009.

Background

2. “Operation Staysafe” basically involves using section 46 (3) of the 1989 Children Act (and the potential use of a police protection order) to remove young people judged by agreed criteria to be vulnerable to a designated place of safety. Within Dudley, the criteria include:
 - Being in possession of, or having consumed, alcohol,
 - Being judged to be too young to be out on the streets at night,
 - Being involved in anti social behaviour but not necessarily committing a criminal offence.
 - Being out in the company of known adult offenders

Once young people are brought to the safe centre, assessments are made by Children’s Services’ staff. The scheme differs from previous approaches in that the emphasis is on the parents having to travel to collect their child, and meet specialist workers from the Youth Offending Service (YOS) and Family and Adolescent Support Team (FAST) staff teams who interview them separately from the young person. Further work is then carried out with the young person and family.

Originating in north Liverpool, “Operation Staysafe” has been extended across 69 local authority areas as part of both the Youth Crime Action Plan and the Tackling Knives Action Programme. Dudley is however **not** one of the 69 areas selected by the Home Office and has developed its own local model funded from the local partnership’s and individual partners’ own resources.

Local Developments

3. Operation Staysafe has been implemented in Dudley since 3 July 2009. This followed a decision of the Crime Reduction Implementation Group (CRIG) on 7 May to pilot it on a partnership basis across the North Dudley township area. The original mandate here was for 10 sessions to be run over the summer period.

Since then, additional funding was found, along with some cost savings, for 14 sessions to be run between July and Christmas. The first 10 have been within North Dudley sector, and the last 4 have been combined across North Dudley and Brierley Hill police sectors.

Resources

4. One safe centre has been used for all 14 sessions. It has been staffed regularly by at least 5 officers from DMBC Children' Services. Typically this has comprised two members of the Youth Offending Service (a parenting specialist, and a caseworker), two members of the Family and Adolescent Support Team (FAST) and a social worker from the District Assessment Team.

For the last four sessions, the safe centre team has comprised of two YOS workers, 1 Connexions Personal Advisor, a youth worker, and the two FAST staff. More recently, there has been significant input from the Youth Service and Connexions on a staff rota basis.

Advance publicity and continual communication was crucial. Twelve thousand leaflets were distributed amongst the schools in the affected areas as well as at libraries, DMBC Housing offices, community groups, youth centres and at PACT meetings. The initiative was presented by the Police and Dudley MBC officers at PACT and Area Committee meetings. There were press and media releases.

In Coseley, during a brief period of escalating ASB and youth disorder problems, over 250 young people found to be in large groups had their names taken and were given a letter advising them and their parents of the initiative in the area. This, and other associated actions, had the effect of reducing the numbers of young people on the streets in the local area from upwards of 300 to around 20-25 in the following weeks.

Police staffing has been targeted at ASB on Friday nights, with the evening shift directed towards Staysafe within both police sectors. This has seen a very steep reduction in the proportion of police time as overtime that has been directed to Staysafe and to tackling ASB on Friday evenings.

Other partners have been involved and have expressed an interest. The Community Renewal Team staff have assisted in informing local community groups, and in organising the distribution of leaflets. The Zone and Dudley Primary Care Trust are involved in different aspects of subsequent work relating to alcohol misuse.

Results so far

5. 43 young people have to date been brought to re safe centre. 35 of these have been brought in from within North Dudley sector, and 8 from within Brierley Hill Sector. The median ages have been 14-15, and the gender split has been approximately 2:1 male / female. All bar one of the young people were White British.
 - Over 85% of young people brought to the safe centre had alcohol misuse as a major presenting problem, including all of the girls brought in.
 - Overwhelmingly, Fridays have been the busiest nights.

- Only 2 out of 43 young people brought to the safe centre were repeat contacts.
 - 36 out of 43 young people had their parents attend the safe centre (85%). The parents of the remaining 7 young people were either genuinely unable or else unwilling to attend - of these, 4 young people had other relatives attend, and 3 were taken home owing to particularly exceptional circumstances.
 - Contrary to initial fears, no young people were taken into care though early precautionary enquiries were made to Emergency Duty Team in 4 cases.
6. The scheme has unveiled a concerning level of vulnerability amongst some young people out on Friday night. A significant proportion of this stems from alcohol intoxication. Some other young people did not present alcohol as a problem but faced challenging situations both inside and outside the family home, and would have otherwise stayed out until the early hours of the next morning.
- Just over half of the young people were referred to Connexions for either Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) or Common Assessment Framework (CAF) involvement. 3 young people were referred to Children's Social Care. In other cases, there were plans for closer working between agencies already involved. Onward referrals were made for further parenting support, and in one case for young carer support.
 - The sharing of skills and expertise was widely recognised as being valuable and ongoing. The strong relationship building skills of the social workers, the FAST and YOS staff helped maintain the calm, caring ethos, and enabled the young person and family to be receptive to the key messages of Staysafe. The young persons typically "opened up" to the staff at the centre, and problems were thus easily identified and support therefore readily offered.
 - There has been good intelligence sharing particularly in terms of under-age purchases of alcohol. This indeed had been one of the original objectives of the initiative. As such it has been able to support other initiatives such as the Social Responsibility Scheme, and the work of DMBC Trading Standards.
7. Anecdotally, it appeared that trepidation regarding "social work" intervention in the young people's families had an effect in youth ASB hot-spots being subsequently deserted on Friday nights (mirroring the experience in other parts of the country). Paradoxically, the interaction of the young people and the safe centre staff quickly enabled the young people to relax and "drop their guard". The young people (and sometimes, the parents) typically left the safe centre bearing a more positive and reflective persona than when they first arrived.

Parents and relatives attending were overwhelmingly positive about the scheme. Only two showed hostility. Many on the other hand expressed gratitude and support. Many were previously unaware of their child's whereabouts, alcohol consumption, and the potential risks that were being incurred.

Local Impact

8. The overall consensus amongst police officers on Dudley North sector was that it had been a positive experience and that it had a massive impact on the key ASB hotspot areas on Friday nights. In Gornal, for example, the police were receiving 1-2 ASB calls per night relating to young people compared to 35-40 the previous year. Feedback from members of the community, and elected Members - at PACT meetings by email and at Area Committees- has been very positive.

Though 43 young people being brought to the safe centre might appear relatively low, this figure can be considered alongside the fact that these young people will in most instances have been removed from a group of other young people. In nearly all of these instances, it is only one or two young people that are removed from a larger group, by virtue of their being judged to be vulnerable. The impact of the removal of a small number of young people is multiplied simply through others directly witnessing this. The communicating of this experience through text, instant messaging and social networking sites, as well as by word of mouth at school etc. has meant that the initiative has a far wider resonance. A Staysafe evening operation can therefore be successful even if apparently low numbers are brought in.

There was initial anecdotal evidence of some youngsters becoming drunk in groups after school, as early as 5 p.m. Due to the early start of Staysafe in the evening, young people were picked up quickly and problems with the after-effects of drinking alcohol were prevented. The subsequent benefit was that officers, no longer now having to deal with an alcohol fuelled escalation of ASB, were able to attend other crime reports far more quickly.

There is no evidence of displacement to other areas. Some “decoy” vans bearing the safe and sound Staysafe insignia were put out on nights when stay safe was not running.

Conclusions

9. Staysafe can be an effective tool in reducing ASB, providing there is good communication with the general public and young people in particular.
10. Young people, parents and other adult family members are strongly receptive to the notion of assertive preventative action so long as it is couched in terms of ensuring the young people’s safety and welfare, and of supporting parental awareness.
- 11, Staysafe is a valuable tool in addressing the reassurance and trust and confidence agenda. It is an action that can be visible, and can be couched in the language of the popular concerns in a neighbourhood without demonising young people or their families. The support of elected Members proved very important.

Staysafe is most effective when utilised alongside other preventative and enforcement measures both on the night and indeed between operations. This will involve exploring more relevant alternatives for engaging young people.

Next Steps

12. The Crime Reduction Implementation Group decided on 12 November 2009 for a further trial period is given to Staysafe to explore how it can be applied across the borough.

The aim would to gauge whether a system of one or two safe centres operating on a night is the most workable. This trial would cover Fridays between end January and the end of March 2010, involving up to 9 sessions.

13. Similarly, options are now being explored for implementing Staysafe across different parts of the borough during 2010-2011, possibly involving over 20 Friday evenings. These would be mindful of the need not to unduly raise public expectations of universal coverage, nor for the momentum or its wider resonance to be lost.

There are a number of options for funding this, including:

- LPSA Reward Grant
- CRIG Safer and Stronger Communities Fund (SSCF)
- Home Office / CLG award of £44K towards tackling ASB

Finance

14. There are possible financial implications for the Council arising from this report. As reported at the beginning of the report, Dudley's Staysafe does not receive any direct Government funding. This may depend on the level of in-kind (staff time) contributions to the programme agreed, and any agreed ratio of partnership.

Law

15. The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act places a statutory duty on the local authority to work with partner agencies, and to do all it reasonably can to reduce crime and disorder within its jurisdiction.

The 2006 Police and Justice Act amended this to also include the reduction of anti-social behaviour as a statutory responsibility.

S46 (3) of the Children Act 1989 enables the police to remove a young person to a place of safety where that young person is judged to be at risk of significant harm.

Equality Impact

16. This report is in accordance with the council's equality and diversity policy.

Recommendation

17. It is recommended that the committee note the information contained in this report.

John Poyellis

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