

**2 December 2002**

**Carrier Bag Culture Working  
Group**

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**Report of Head of Overview and Scrutiny**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. To introduce the report of the Carrier Bag Culture Working Group.

**Background**

2. A working group has been investigating the issue of disaffected young people in the Wheatley Hill, Thornley and Shotton areas of Easington. This has been carried out under the general heading of 'The Carrier Bag Culture' which was a perception of young people gathering in groups with plastic bags containing alcohol and drugs.
3. The investigation into this issue has revealed that addressing issues for young people in this area is a very complex issue. Those young people involved in alcohol and drugs are in the minority and there are other groups who perhaps can be overlooked in the provision of facilities.
4. The full report of the working group is attached. This has been carried out in partnership with Easington District Council. Wide-ranging evidence has been taken including, most importantly, discussions with young people facilitated by Investors in Children. The principle of the working group has been not to make assumptions but to listen carefully to young people in coming to suggestions about improvements.
5. The report attached was considered by the working group on the 21<sup>st</sup> November as the papers for this meeting were being despatched. Any amendments to the report will be mentioned at the Sub-Committee meeting.

**Recommendations**

6. The Sub-Committee is asked to consider the report and the recommendations. The distribution of the report to the many agencies who have an interest in this issue needs to be carefully considered. It is important that the lessons learned in this project are passed on to other agencies to assist in 'joining up' initiatives in this area.

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## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE FOR STRONG, HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES**

## **REPORT OF WORKING GROUP - THE 'CARRIER BAG CULTURE'**



**'NOWHERE TO GO'**

**DECEMBER 2002**

## THE 'CARRIER BAG CULTURE'

### INTRODUCTION

1. A Working Group was set up by the Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Promoting Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities to consider the issue of disaffected young people in the Easington District area. The title of the project, 'The Carrier Bag Culture' was originally coined by Councillor Morris Nicholls, the Chairman of the Sub-Committee. This broadly described a feature in some local communities of young people congregating in secluded areas with carrier bags of alcohol and drugs.
2. The Working Group involved representation from Easington District Council. Officers from Easington District Council also participated in this project enthusiastically in a partnership approach.
3. The precise terms of reference of the project took some time to finalise. The topic covered the perception from local communities but the major issue was seeking to address the position of the young people involved.
4. The need to approach this project with an open mind and no pre-conceptions was stressed.

**It was acknowledged at an early stage that the over-riding theme of the project would be listening to young people and not making assumptions until their perception had been fully understood.**

5. Liam Cairns from Investing in Children in conjunction with the Chairman of the Working Group were commissioned to identify appropriate young people with whom in due course a dialogue could be secured. The aim was to seek to fully understand the views and aspirations of the young people.
6. In the meantime, the Working Group sought to gather relevant information about this issue, initiatives currently in operation and the stakeholders who are involved. In this process, information was to be drawn from the Crime and Disorder Audit, the Youth Strategy, information from the Community Support Unit, other relevant bodies and local people.
7. To emphasise the community nature of this exercise the Working Group meetings were held at local venues – the Wheatley Hill Heritage Centre, the Shotton Community Centre, Thornley Community Centre and the Wheatley Hill Community Centre.

### INITIAL POSITION STATEMENT

8. The Working Group received a position statement from Peter Brookes, Head of the Community Support Unit at Durham County Council and Steve Arkley, Head of Community Regeneration, Easington District Council which explained the broad concern about groups of young

people, particularly within communities in the west part of Easington district. Despite a number of initiatives within the district, there appeared to be an increase in the number of young people who appear to be excluded from community activities. There is also an increase in incidents of young people involved in anti-social behaviour in certain areas of the district. The perception from adults is that young people congregated in groups with plastic bags containing drugs and alcohol. This had attracted complaints from local people.

9. The Working Group also received a presentation from Liam Cairns, Project Manager, Investing in Children. Liam explained that Investing in Children was a multi-agency approach involving the County Council, Health Authorities and District Councils. The basic premise of Investing in Children is that adults do not always know best. Accordingly, there was a need to listen seriously to young people.
10. In Liam's view, if recommendations from the Working Group were to make a difference, it was important that:-
  - Young people were involved fully in this investigation
  - Young people were spoken to as citizens and not as 'problems' because they could make a positive contribution to the community
  - No firm timescale be placed on the project.
11. At the first meeting, therefore, it was agreed that:-
  - Liam Cairns, in conjunction with the Chairman of the Working Group would determine the area and the young people who were to form the focus of this investigation
  - Liam and his team will seek to gain insights from young people which will be reported to the Working Group to assist in framing recommendations
  - In the meantime, the Working Group would seek to gather relevant information about this topic, the initiatives currently in place and their success and the stakeholders involved.

#### **EVIDENCE FROM THE YOUTH OFFENDING TEAM**

12. Terry Sharkey, Youth Offending Team Manager, gave evidence to the Working Group about the initiatives undertaken by the Youth Offending Team within the Easington District area.
13. Terry indicated that he had been involved with the Youth Offending Team since January 2001. He explained that the Youth Offending Service was a partnership between Durham County Council, Durham Constabulary, County Durham and Tees Valley Health Authority and the Probation Service. The main purpose of the service was to prevent offending by children and young people.

14. The service had three geographically based teams – the East, North and South; and two county-wide teams – the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme and the Restorative Justice Team.
15. Statistical information produced for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2000 to the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2001 indicated that, as far as the Youth Offending Team was concerned, there was a general trend of reduction in relevant offences and pre-court decisions. Nevertheless, in some wards within Easington, including the wards under consideration by this Working Group, there was a significant increase in recorded offending.
16. Terry gave some further information about some relevant initiatives which were in operation. He mentioned, in particular, **Positive Futures** which aims to reduce youth offending, drug misuse and increase regular participation in sport and physical activity. This was targeted at 10 to 16 year olds who were deemed to be 'at risk' or are already involved with crime or drugs. This programme was available across the County and had recently been introduced locally at Wellfield School to cater for the Wingate, Wheatley Hill and Shotton Colliery areas.
17. A further initiative was termed '**Splash**'. This provides young people with constructive use of leisure time during the major school holidays.
18. Terry also mentioned the **Youth Inclusion Programmes** which were currently not available in the areas under consideration. The aim of these programmes was to ensure that the most at risk young people are included in mainstream activities by offering support to help them overcome a variety of social problems. The key targets for these programmes were to:-
  - Reduce arrest rates within the target groups by 60%
  - Reduce recorded crime in the area by 30%
  - Achieve at least one-third reduction in truancy and exclusions in relation to the young people involved.
19. Other initiatives mentioned were the **On-Track Programme** and the **Co-ordination of Social Inclusion Programmes**.
20. *One issue for the Working Group might be whether the Youth Inclusion Programme would be suitable in this area. Also, there appears to be schemes for those involved in crime or drugs but not specific schemes for other local young people.*
21. Terry concluded by indicating that there were well-developed multi-agency arrangements in operation in the Easington area particularly under the aegis of the Community Safety Partnership. He indicated that the Youth Offending Service would be pleased to support any initiatives which result from this project.

**INPUT FROM THE POLICE**

21. Acting Superintendent Carole Thompson from Peterlee Divisional Police Office attended the Working Group to give evidence on behalf of the Constabulary. She had worked in the Peterlee area since February 2001.
22. Carole produced a summary of incidents reported to the police within the Easington area concerning youths causing annoyance. The general position was that in the Easington district area as a whole, there was an average of 41.6% incidents per 1,000 population. The statistics also showed that in the district as a whole there had been a 36% increase in such reports over the last three years. In the local areas under consideration, it was noted that all these areas were below the district average. However, in the Thornley area, there had been an increase of over 100% over the last three years and over 84% in the Shotton Colliery area. It was pointed out that these statistics represented the number of calls received and did not measure the outcome.
23. Carole outlined the issues raised by Parish Councils recently. This included youths causing annoyance and complaints about off-road motor cycles in the Shotton Colliery area and problems of young people drinking and causing annoyance in certain areas of Thornley and Wheatley Hill. In addition, information was shared about the perceptions of 'beat' officers.
24. Dealing specifically with police powers and alcohol, Carole explained that an alcohol free zone had been introduced in Wheatley Hill under bye-law powers. The general outcome was that this issue had been moved further out of the area rather than producing a resolution. Alcohol was perceived to be a more significant problem than drugs in relation to youths causing annoyance.
25. The powers available to the police in relation to alcohol were explained. This included test purchases and also the Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997. Carole explained a difficulty in relation to this legislation which only empowered the pouring away of alcohol where a container had been opened. This was an issue which had been the subject of representations to the Home Office. *The Working Group might wish to lend its support to these representations.*
26. Carole's overall impression was that whilst the issue of young people perceived to be causing a nuisance was recognised by the police, the areas under investigation were basically no different than other areas within the District and the County. Carole confirmed that the issue was worse on Friday and Saturday evenings between the hours of 4 p.m. and 9 p.m.
27. In response to a question about which of the available initiatives had proved to be the most positive, Carole thought that locally based activities were more beneficial to the young people, and, in particular,

she mentioned an initiative involving a disco which had been popular. She did recognise that sometimes action by the police and other agencies simply moved the issue to another area.

**PRESENTATION FROM STEVE ARKLEY, HEAD OF COMMUNITY REGENERATION, AND PAUL SHADFORTH, YOUTH STRATEGY OFFICER, EASINGTON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

28. Steve Arkley and Paul Shadforth attended a session of the Working Group held at Shotton Community Centre. They provided information from the District of Easington Crime and Disorder Audit and supporting documentation. In particular, they drew attention to two recent surveys, one relating to residents and one to young people.

***Community Safety Residents' Survey for Easington District (Autumn 2001) - Main findings.***

29. The findings of this survey relevant to this investigation were:-
- The public perception is that over the last three years they are considerably more concerned about drug and solvent misuse, alcohol misuse and young people causing a nuisance.
  - The public suggest the main priorities in tackling these issues are:
    - ❖ Removing drug dealers
    - ❖ More measures to stop anti-social behaviour
    - ❖ More community beat policing
    - ❖ Tackling violent crime in the street
    - ❖ More parental control
    - ❖ Stopping underage drinking
    - ❖ Stopping vandalism
    - ❖ More CCTV cameras
    - ❖ Better access to leisure facilities for young people
    - ❖ Tackle theft from homes and gardens
    - ❖ Better road safety near schools.

***Easington District Council – Youth Strategy  
Youth Consultation Survey – February 2002***

30. Taken from this survey, the young people's perceptions of problems in their local area were:-
- Young people feel much safer when they are in a group at night
  - Young people find drug and solvent misuse in their local area a significant problem
  - However, young people themselves have a greater concern about the problems of gangs of young people.

31. Young people suggest the main priorities in tackling these issues are:-

- ❖ Tackling the drug problem
- ❖ Learn more about sexual health, pregnancy risks etc.
- ❖ Better rehabilitation programme for drug users
- ❖ Providing somewhere for people to live
- ❖ More police on the streets
- ❖ Create more jobs to bring back a local community
- ❖ Police to be more helpful and friendly.

32. *Some common priority issues for both residents and young people arise from this research:-*

- *Tackling drug issues*
- *An improved 'policing role'*

*The residents' survey suggests a desire for action and measures to stop anti-social behaviour. The young people's survey has a stronger emphasis on providing longer-term solutions and tackling the causes.*

### **Crime Trends 1998/2001**

33. Steve Arkley gave an overview of crime trends within the District. In summary:-

- Overall, total recorded crime had fallen by approximately 25%
- However, Anti-social Behaviour complaints increased by approximately 22% during the same period. The largest increases were recorded in the main population centres but many of the highest percentage increases were in the west of the district – over 106% in the Thornley ward.
- The overall trend since the audit period in relation to anti-social behaviour is still upwards.

### **Recent Local Initiatives**

34. Steve gave an explanation about a number of recent local initiatives which had been introduced to try to address problems related to young people within the Easington District area. In particular, he drew attention to the following:-

- Five street wardens are to be introduced in the west of Easington District in the near future. Their main purpose is public reassurance.
- Experience has shown that a variety of initiatives need to be available dependent upon circumstances



- The Anti-Social Behaviour Working Group has been responsible for a number of 'flagship' local initiatives particularly in relation to diversionary schemes and partnership working with the police and others. This work is to be funded by Neighbourhood Renewal funding.

#### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

35. The terms of reference finally agreed by the Working Group were:-

**To consider the issues relating to disaffected young people in the ward areas of Shotton, Thornley and Wingate focusing in particular on the interests of the young people and to make recommendations about the most effective ways of assisting these young people and their communities and providing guidance in similar situations throughout the county.**

#### **DISCUSSION WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THORNLEY AND WHEATLEY HILL PARTNERSHIPS**

36. One Working Group evening session was held at Thornley Community Centre to provide an opportunity for representatives of the Thornley and Wheatley Hill Partnerships to discuss their views about this local issue. Liam Cairns was able to attend this meeting to give some indications of progress with the dialogue with some young people in Wheatley Hill.
37. The views from the representatives of both partnerships were very positive in terms of concern to understand and address the issues raised by local young people. The consensus appeared to be that the best prospect for success with initiatives with local young people would be to introduce schemes or proposals which were:-
- owned by young people and continually included them in planning and delivery
  - had goals of achievement from the outset
  - monitored on a consistent basis to seek improvement.

#### **THE VIEWS OF SOME YOUNG PEOPLE FROM WHEATLEY HILL**

38. Thanks to the assistance of staff from Investing in Children, a meeting was organised between Councillor Nicholls, Chairman of the Working Group, Councillor Atkinson from Easington District Council and five young people from Wheatley Hill.
39. This meeting followed some intensive work carried out with hard to reach groups in the Wheatley Hill area. Having gained the confidence of the young people, they were prepared to enter into a dialogue about some of the issues which arose from the project.
40. To start with, the young people were a little tentative but over time during the discussion they gained in confidence. They had prepared a summary of their views and aspirations. This is set out below:-

### **Issues Raised by Young People Living in Wheatley Hill**

*Nothing to do*

*No youth club (at least not for us)*

*Lots of 'no go areas':*

- *Johnson Estate (twitchy curtains)*
- *Community Centre*
- *Front Street (we get moved by police)*
- *Cemetery*
- *Pubs and Clubs*
- *The Co-op (we can only go in 1 at a time, can't hang around outside)*
- *The Fish Box (smack heads).*

*Adults don't give us a chance*

*Police stop us and ask us where we are going*

*We get tarred with the same brush (as the smack heads)*

*We have to keep on the move or we get hassle from adults*

### **Things to improve the village**

*Snooker Hall*

*Somewhere to sit and listen to music*

*Decent bus service*

*A disco like 'Breathless' in Blackhall*

*A café*

*A youth club for older teenagers*

*People to treat us like we are part of the community*

*Things to do, money to go places*

### **Older Teenagers Who Hang Around the Fish Box**

*Only a few left, some are in prison*

*We stay away from them*

*Some of them are ok when not in a gang*

*Not all drink and take drugs*

*Get them on their own and they will talk to you.*

41. In essence, the young people were not asking for significant facilities. They indicated that they congregate in groups because there was little for them to do in the village. They were then moved from location to location because of opposition from local residents. They, themselves, did perceive a small group of young people who were using drugs and were seen to be a particular problem in the local area. Drugs were thought to be an increasing problem in the local area although alcohol was not a particular issue amongst the young people. They were keen to point out that they did not wish to be "tarred with the same brush" as the young people who used drugs.

42. Their main request was for somewhere to meet, play pool, have coffee and play music in the evenings. Their view was that currently they were not welcome at the local community centre. It was recognised that this was a product of previous difficulties at the community centre. This generation of young people, however, appeared to be penalised by the actions of their predecessors. They expressed enthusiasm in getting involved in discussions with those in authority to see whether facilities could be restored in conjunction with them.
43. The Chairman offered to seek to involve representatives from this Group in a meeting with the centre manager at Wheatley Hill Community Centre and also offered to facilitate involvement in partnership meetings. This would provide an opportunity for the young people to understand the issues and, hopefully, seek to influence outcomes.
44. The young people also raised the issue of improved transport because of the difficulties of travelling conveniently to destinations, often only short distances outside the village.
45. The Chairman agreed that he and Councillor Atkinson would meet again with this group of young people on the 18<sup>th</sup> November at Wheatley Hill Community Centre to discuss progress.
46. It was seen to be important to demonstrate to the young people that their involvement in this process was a positive step and, if possible, the delivery of some tangible improvement within a relatively short period of time was very important. Nevertheless, the process might be seen to be the start of restoring a dialogue with some hard to reach young people in this area. It was important, therefore, that this process is ongoing to seek to ensure sustainable progress.
47. In summary, the young people thought that:-
  - drugs were an increasing problem in their area. They also thought that people were coming into the district bringing drugs with them. Their view was that alcohol was not a particular issue amongst the young people.
  - they were moved on from location to location without justification. Many local areas were effectively 'no go' areas and all young people appeared to be tarred with the same brush and assumptions made that they were trouble-makers.
  - the most important improvement would be somewhere to sit and have a coffee, play pool and listen to music. There would be a need for different events on different nights of the week for various age groups who need to be considered.
  - there was a need for reliable transport so that young people could travel out of their community to other events or friends.

48. It was agreed that efforts will be made to involve young people in local meetings which were seeking to make improvements in facilities and services. Councillor Nicholls would seek to involve some young people in the Community Centre Partnership and other local partnerships and meetings. In particular, a meeting would take place with the manager of the Wheatley Hill Community Centre to see what facilities might be made available. Also, the young people would be invited back to a meeting to assess progress.

### **COMMUNITY APPRAISALS MARCH 2002 - MAIN RELEVANT ISSUES**

49. The Working Group was assisted by the detailed community appraisals which had recently been carried out for each ward in Easington District. There was much relevant information in the appraisals which provided assistance to the Working Group in analysing the complex issues which arose and seeking to recommend improvements. The relevant sections are set out below.

#### **Wheatley Hill Ward**

##### Youth Provision

- Residents are very concerned about the lack of youth provision in the village. There is very little for young people across a wide age range (perhaps 11-20) to do. Some young people are causing a nuisance and are getting mixed up with drink and drugs. People feel that they would benefit from professional help in addressing the needs of this group. Current youth work provision is considered inadequate in that it is only for a few hours each week and it does not involve detached work. Better provision for this age group should help alleviate associated problems including crime, drugs, alcohol abuse and vandalism.
- A young persons group to voice the views of young people should be set up. This could involve a review of existing youth provision, better inter-agency co-ordination, implementation of a detached youth work project and a volunteer/training programme (training adults to work with young people).
- In relation to Wheatley Hill Community Centre, there is a need for further development and support.
- A study of transport provision was suggested. Local people were restricted in seeking recreation and leisure opportunities outside the village because of the lack of bus services in evenings and weekends. Suggested solutions include car sharing, community transport and a co-ordinated late night link bus as well as re-routing existing services.

## Thornley Ward

### Youth provision.

- Local residents are very concerned that more should be done for the young people of the village. The need has been identified for facilities to house appropriate activities and also for skilled youth workers to engage the young people, find out what they want and help to provide it. The planned new Community Centre will have some ability to accommodate the needs of young people, but, in the meantime, activities are being organised in the old Community Centre.
- A survey carried out by Groundwork into the needs of young people in Thornley suggested they would benefit from one or more places where they could go to meet and take part in organised activities.
- Residents are conscious of the need to encourage more young people to participate in the debate about the future of Thornley.
- Poor public transport is a concern. The service to Peterlee is acceptable and there is an hourly service to Durham, Hartlepool and Sunderland. However, residents cannot easily get to Murton, Seaham or the coast.

## Shotton Ward

### Youth provision

- The Community Centre is focused on youth provision, but it has a number of problems. These failings means that there is little inter-generation activity. It is seen as a place which is unsafe at night.
  - There is a need for a youth worker at the community centre as well as a need to fill the vacancy for a detached youth worker but there is a shortage of qualified youth workers. Residents think that the need for a dedicated worker is greater than the resolution of the accommodation issue. There are potential recruits available if some way of giving them adequate training could be found. Local people feel that the available training routes for youth work are inadequate.
  - Schemes to tackle the community centre's weaknesses and the implementation of the 'Victoria Show Ground' scheme will help provide the facilities for young people.
50. A specific meeting with young people was arranged to discuss transport improvements. The outcome of the meeting was a greater understanding amongst the young people about the scheme introduced as a result of Investing in Children for discounted travel for young people between 14 and 16. It was hoped that this would result in more young people taking advantage of this scheme. In addition, travel logs were

provided to the young people so that they could provide information about the reliability of the current bus service. The transport section of the County Council agreed to explore the possibility of improving links to Blackhall and around the local villages.

## SUMMARY

### 51. Issues Identified by the Working Group

The description of the Carrier Bag Culture had its origins in concern about small groups of young people perceived to be involved with drugs and alcohol and excluded from local society. The investigation by this Working Group to date has identified a variety of groups of young people. The groups, with which the Working Group has been able to have a dialogue, have not necessarily displayed the characteristics of the Carrier Bag Culture as originally perceived. Indeed, the young people who spoke to the Working Group themselves make the point quite strongly that one of their concerns is that young people are all 'tarded with the same brush'. Many groups of young people who are perceived to be a 'problem' are not involved in crime, drugs or alcohol.

52. It is noticeable that there are schemes for those identified as involved in crime and drugs but perhaps those groups of young people who are not identified in this category can be overlooked. Preventative action should be a key aim of any strategies to divert young people away from criminal or anti-social behaviour. Looking at these groups, therefore, is an important element in any potential improvement in this area.

## Findings

53. In considering the work of the group, a number of broad issues had become clear:-

- There is no simple or single solution in this area. Indeed, the issues to be addressed very often relate to either particular groups of young people or individuals which require approaches aimed at these particular groups or individuals.
- The lack of community facilities for young people appears to be agreed by the community, both young people and adults.
- There is a local increase in anti-social behaviour.
- There are a considerable number of initiatives seeking to address relevant issues within the district, but the Working Group considered that more focus is required to provide facilities for young people, not simply to tackle crime or drug issues. Particular care needs to be taken to ensure that these initiatives are joined up and achieve maximum impact and benefit.

- There is a need to identify and consider the possibilities of improving transport facilities in consultation with young people.
- Positive community policing was important particularly from the viewpoint of young people. It was recognised that a case conference system had been introduced to deal with issues such as anti social behaviour. A further suggestion was made that a local surgery to allow issues to be discussed informally with the police might be a positive step. This could provide the opportunity for young people perhaps assisted by Investing in Children to build up a dialogue with the Police. In discussing this issue, however, the concern from the Police was recognised that they were under pressure to provide 'bobbies on the beat' and did not wish to use valuable time for a surgery if this was not going to be beneficial or used by local people. Further the impact of the new street wardens needed to be assessed (again in conjunction with young people).
- Following discussions with one group of young people in Wheatley Hill a simple but important lesson might have arisen:-
  - **the need to re-engage with the current generation of young people, to listen to them, to involve them in planning and delivery, have goals of achievement set from the outset and monitored on a consistent basis to secure gradual improvement.**
- Seeking to understand and engage with young people is not an easy task but could provide the possibility of more sustainable improvement within this local area and possibly throughout the county.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

54. Bearing in mind the complexity of the issues which have arisen in this project, the Working Group recognised that there will always be limitations in introducing improvements or new initiatives. Nevertheless, there was a strong feeling that opportunities for some young people were being overlooked and that the community needed to do more to try to engage youngsters both in their interests and that of the wider community.

55. In the light of its findings, the Working Group recommends that:-

A multi-disciplinary officer group should be set up to address the issues which have been identified. This multi-disciplinary group should ideally include representatives from the police, community education, community safety (both district and council), community development both district and county, youth strategy and Investing in Children and the County Council transport section. This group should be charged with seeking to deliver, in partnership with the young people assisted by Investing in Children, (in accordance with the principles established in this report) some practical improvements for facilities for young people in

the local areas which have been the subject of this project. The group should be asked to report back to the Members' Working Group within a period of three months to assess and discuss any progress and, if necessary, adjust direction.