

# LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST

## Community Safety Board

26<sup>th</sup> June 2008

Item No.

**6(ii)**

## Young People and the Police

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### Classification:

For information

### Status:

Open

## 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This paper introduces a consultation report funded by the Community Safety Board about the perceptions young people have of the Police and community safety issues. A previous paper was submitted to the Community Safety Board on the 24<sup>th</sup> January outlining the purpose and approach to the project.
- 1.2 The consultation project was partly a response to the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) request for all London Boroughs to contribute to the MPA's Youth Scrutiny Panel. An interim report, following a first stage of the project, was submitted to the MPA on the 29<sup>th</sup> February 2008. The final report is now attached for information, with the findings and next steps previously presented to key stakeholders including the Borough Commander and Cabinet Member for Community Safety on the 4<sup>th</sup> June 2008.
- 1.3 A key outcome of this project has been securing funding (from the Community Safety Board) and support to form a Youth Independent Advisory Group (YIAG) to inform the Police, the Council and their Partners on community safety issues. This is in acknowledgement of the value provided by actively engaging with young people on key community safety issues.
- 1.4 The project has been delivered in partnership between the police, Community Safety Board and Waltham Forest Council, with the Council's Community Engagement Unit managing the project.

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### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Community Safety Board are asked to:

- A. Formally agree to establish and support a Youth Independent Advisory Group
- B. Note the issues to action at section 3 of the main report and consider which areas could be taken forward as part of a consolidated action plan

### 3. PROJECT AIMS & OBJECTIVES

3.1 The overall aim of the consultation project was to engage directly with young people to inform local and regional policing and community safety activity with young people. More specifically, the objectives of the consultation were to:

- Identify ways of improving the confidence of young people to report crime and engage with the police as witnesses
- Identify ways to address the criminalisation of young people
- Provide advice and recommendations for youth engagement activity to be taken forward in Waltham Forest

### 4. APPROACH TO CONSULTATION

#### 4.1 Overview

4.1.1 The consultation activity took place over two stages:

- a) **Preliminary Consultation (21<sup>st</sup> February 2008)**: A group of young people were recruited to take part in a structured discussion on the issues outlined at paragraph 3.1. The discussions and findings from this session were written up into an interim report for submission to the MPA scrutiny panel by the deadline of **29<sup>th</sup> February 2008**.
- b) **Citizen's Panel Event**: The second stage of the consultation, was a 'Young People's Citizen Panel Event' on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2008. On this evening, the young people received presentations from the police and those partners who the young people had identified as key players in preventing youth involvement in crime. The aim of this session was to establish a dialogue between the young people and the key stakeholders and provide an opportunity for both parties to challenge each other's assumptions. Inspector Mike Hamer (Youth Partnerships), Colette McCann (Head of Youth Service), Andrew Sinclair (Head of Youth Offending Team) and Alastair Macorkindale (LBWF Community Safety) were amongst those who presented. A final session was held with the young people on the 7<sup>th</sup> May to reflect on the findings and develop a series of issues to action.

#### 4.2 The young people

4.2.1 18 young people were invited to take part in the initial consultation exercise. These young people were broadly representative in terms of age (14 – 20), ethnicity and geographic location.

4.2.2 The young people were recruited according to their particular interest in community safety and policing issues. So far as possible, we also deliberately invited a spectrum of young people in terms of their previous experiences of criminal activity. The young people ranged from those who have had no criminal involvement, or even exposure, to those who had previous and current experience of the criminal justice system.

4.2.3 The young people represented:

- **LBWF Youth Offending Team**
- **LBWF Young Advisor's Scheme**
- **Local Schools** (George Mitchell Community School, Norlington School for Boys, Leytonstone School, Rushcroft School, Highams Park School, Heathcote School, Tom Hood School)
- **Rollin-G** (a youth-led community mediation group formed of young people previously involved in crime)
- **Young People Stop & Search Group** (a student group formed within George Mitchell School to communicate Stop & Search Rights to other young people)
- **Barnardo's Children's Rights** (Looked After Children)

4.2.4 Of these initial 18, 12 young people have continued to be part of the project and it is intended that this group will go on to form the borough's Youth Independent Advisory Group on Community Safety Matters.

## 5 KEY FINDINGS

5.1 The consultation identified six key areas for attention:

- **Ongoing dialogue with Police and community safety issues**

The group felt that there was a need for a more frequent and ongoing dialogue with the police and young people. Their perception was that adults were always fighting the wrong fires, for example:

*"The police have it in their heads that its all about postcodes or road codes, when it's really not. They need to give us the chance to explain what's really going on." (Female, 15, Leyton)*

This issue provided the foundation for developing the Youth Independent Advisory Group

- **Get in there early!**

The perception of the young people involved was that children as young as 12 are involved in serious crime in Waltham Forest. By this stage they

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already have knowledge of knives, gangs and drugs. More needs to be done to identify these young people who are risk of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour or gang-related crime. In particular, this needs to start in primary school and provide the correct support during the transition to secondary school when young people are trying to form their identify with a new peer group and may be particularly susceptible to becoming criminally involved.

- **Train up parents!**

The young people unanimously felt that the role of parents and close family in supporting young people to develop a 'strong state of mind' was crucial. However, in many cases, young people are let down in the home and, by their teenage years, are not equipped with the necessary values and strength of character to avoid trouble. Where possible, we need to support parents or carers to support their children.

- **Smart Guidance**

The group felt that a majority of young people, particularly those who don't benefit from a supportive home environment, need support to make smart choices in life. By 'smart choices', the group were referring to those decisions that would lead them away from crime and into a sustainable career path.

- **Breaking the quick fix system**

The young people identified the appeal of 'fast cash' as one of the main drivers for youth involvement in crime and, as such, felt that breaking this 'quick fix system' is something that needs to be explored. In part, they felt this was a question of educating young people about creating a sustainable future for themselves and providing them with incentives to have the patience to see this through.

The group felt that, key to the success of breaking this system, was the identification and elimination of the 'control figure' or 'big guys', spoken of in the context of one of the main causes of criminal involvement of young people.

- **A prison holiday**

The group felt that 'doing time' was not a deterrent to 'doing crime' – even when challenged on this at the "Citizen Panel" session the views of the group remained strong on this point. Several people felt that prison was actually a positive option compared to living on the estates, in that you are secure, well fed and have opportunities to get training. In sum, it was felt that prison had become normalized amongst a proportion of young people and was no longer considered to be the terrifying option it once was.

## **6 NEXT STEPS & TIMESCALES**

- 6.1 The borough's first Youth Independent Advisory Group will be formally launched by the end of July 2008 and is expected to be fully functional by September 2008. The project will be managed by Waltham Forest Council's Community Engagement Unit, and funded by the Community Safety Board. Its work plan will be guided by a steering group of representatives from the police, the Council and the Community Safety Board. Many of the issues raised above will inform the work and focus of the YIAG.
- 6.2 It is hoped that the YIAG will be a flagship mechanism for engaging young people on police and community safety issues and will be an example of successful partnership working.
- 6.3 On a functional level, it will act as a sounding board on practical and strategic police and community safety issues and have an advisory function on tactical policing issues affecting young people locally.