

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

PUBLIC MEETING

LIFE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN WINCHESTER

22 January 2007

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman welcomed approximately 25 young people together with approximately 25 members of the public, representatives of local youth groups and Councillors to the meeting, which was held in the Science Lecture Theatre, Peter Symonds College.

The Chairman explained that the evening was an opportunity for the Council and young people to better engage with each other on local issues. The evening's debate would focus on two subjects: the representation of young people in the Media and the provision of recreation facilities and open spaces.

2. The Representation of Young People in the Media Presentation by Fern Calver, Hampshire County Council Youth Service

Mr Calver gave the Forum a presentation, which is appended to these notes and available from the City Council's website.

The discussion gave the Forum an opportunity to consider how young people were represented in both the national and local written press.

Mr Calver reported the findings of a survey to the Forum. During the discussion on this survey, several people considered that its results could be misleading as some of the respondents may have "admitted" to committing crimes only to gain kudos from their peers. It also depended on the type of law that was being broken – for example, most adults exceeded speed limits but would not consider themselves to be criminals. It was generally agreed that the statistic that one in four youths carry knives probably did not reflect Winchester.

With regard to local press cuttings, Mr Calver asked the audience to rank each of the press stories as to whether they represented young people in a positive, negative or neutral manner. In summary, the results and comments made against each of these stories were:

"Teenager charged with sex attack on boy, aged 8"

The majority of the Forum considered this story to be neutral

"Hammer attack on schoolboy"

Those present considered this story to be generally neutral, although it had associated gangs with young people with apparently little supporting evidence.

"Bus stop 'youth magnet' to go"

The article had not investigated the possible causes of the vandalism to the bus stop, which may have been that those that congregated there had no

where else to go. It was suggested that the removal of the bus stop, on the basis that it had become a place for young people to gather, could also be used as an argument to demolish schools!

“Businesses chip in to help young musicians raise more cash”

Most considered this story to represent young people positively.

“Pupil suffers blurred vision after gun prank”

In considering this story as neutral, it was suggested that the article could have investigated how the ball-bearing gun had got into the school and whether any adult was at fault for this.

“Hundreds new support officers to fight yob crime”

A member of the public that spoke made a general point that many of the positive stories in the Hampshire Chronicle were contained on the Education Page only, which could mean that there were not as widely read as they could otherwise have been.

“Teenager escapes jail after burglary spree”

Most considered this story to be neutral.

“Teenager appears on court over death”

The Forum considered this story to be either negative or neutral and noted that there was little detail on which to make clearer decision.

“Sex Assault”

Neutral

“Barriers set to stop after-dark yobs at retail park”

Negative and the story led the reader to assume that the “yobs” were young males.

“Lottery Cash Boost for Youth Centre”

Positive - although the story was vague. It did not give details as to how the money might be spent nor did it include a quote from a young person.

Conclusion

Mr Calver explained that the National Youth Agency had run a “Positive Images” campaign since 2003 to improve how young people were portrayed in the press. The Agency had found that in 2004, 71% of all press stories involving young people were negative and that, although the stories themselves were increasingly neutral, the headlines remained sensationalist and negative. It had found that 66% of young people did not trust journalists and that only 13% of the stories actually quoted young people themselves. A representative of the Hampshire Chronicle at the meeting explained that this was because the law prevented journalists quoting people under 16 without the permission of a parent or guardian.

Mr Calver also stated that the work of the agency was closely related to the Government's Young People and Change for Children Agenda.

During the discussion the Forum highlighted the subtle use of certain phrases and words used in reporting stories about young people that were rare in stories about adults; such as "gang," "pals" and "yob" (boy, backwards).

Another view put forward was that the stories all related to the loss of innocence in modern society and that they helped sell newspapers through shock value and people's preference to read bad, rather than positive, news.

3. Recreation Facilities and Open Space Provision In Winchester Presentation by Phil Chichester, Inspace Planning

As part of his presentation, Mr Chichester explained that Inspace Planning had been appointed as the Council's consultants to work on Planning Policy Guidance Note 17. This was a requirement for all local authorities from national government to better co-ordinate its provision of recreation facilities and open space provision by drafting a district-wide Strategy.

To start with, Inspace Planning were identifying the current provision of informal and formal green spaces, spaces for sport, parks and gardens, and play areas etc. These would be assessed for their quality against set criteria (based on factors such as accessibility, safety, level of community involvement and others). As part of the Strategy, Inspace Planning was currently in a process of consultation with local communities (of which this meeting of the Forum formed part) to get local people's views.

This process would identify gaps in provision and make recommendations for the Council and its partners to focus the limited resources to meet these gaps (along with better management and maintenance) through a co-ordinated and long term response.

The Forum split into two groups – one of adults and one consisting of young people – to consider the issues raised. Mr Chichester explained these views would be considered as part of the consultation exercise and therefore feed into the Strategy.

In summary, the "young" group raised the following issues:
Need for more leisure facilities, a non-alcohol pub, more seating areas that were dry, clean and safe, better lighting of pitches and walkways, need for more cafes, better public transport links.
That it was reasonable to travel 10-20 minutes to facilities.

The "older group" considered that young people were likely to need:
Informal sports space, areas for nature watching, hanging around, social intercourse, smoking, dog walking, bike riding and skate boarding.
The adult group also considered a 10 minute walking time to the facilities as reasonable.

4. Conclusion

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution to the debates. It was generally agreed that the Forum should continue to engage with young people in locations that were accessible to them and that there was an opportunity for future engagement through existing youth organisations and the University.

The meeting commenced at 4.45pm and concluded at 6.50pm

Chairman