

“Young People and Society”

Public Debates

Guildford, 21 October, and Epsom 25 November 2011

Executive Summary

Jan 2012

Attached is the summary of the proceedings of two public debates about “Young people and society” that were prompted by the August 2011 riots, which did not affect Surrey....but came close.

Key themes

Guildford:

- **inadequacy of provision of facilities for young people**
- **difficulties in recruiting volunteers to run activities, especially for uniformed organisations**
- **the experiences at school critical for young people - would the new Academies help?**
- **importance of early intervention; otherwise the risk of family breakdown and resultant housing, drug and alcohol issues leading into offending behaviour**
- **need for a new moral compass...taking personal responsibility; the understanding of the importance of boundaries...actions/ consequences**
- **concerns about the portrayal of young people in an often hostile media**

Epsom:

- **contribution of communities; taking personal responsibility**
- **the difficulty experienced by students in securing work experience placements pursuant to their courses... contribution of employers to society**
- **value of volunteering as bringing life skills, building CV etc , but the difficulty for young people in doing so with heavy school/college obligations, and often already doing part – time/casual job**
- **concerns about cost of university education, and loss of EMA**
- **value of early intervention**
- **concern about media portrayal of young people.**

“Young People and Society” – Guildford, 21 October, and Epsom 25 November 2011

Summary Proceedings of two public debates:

Background:

In August 2011 there was rioting in several cities in England that attracted enormous media coverage and very public display by real time television coverage. Several detailed studies have since been undertaken into the causes of the riots, which at the time were widely attributed to young people. Two studies¹ have reviewed the causes of the riots.....The part played by young people has been analysed by the Ministry of Justice², and whilst “young people” were **not responsible** for the majority of the crime, they clearly played a significant part in it. The study reviews the prosecutions that had been undertaken by September, and shows that:

“Comparisons by age show that 21 per cent of those brought before the courts for offences relating to the public disorder were aged 10-17 (juveniles) and that a further 31 per cent were aged 18-20. Only six per cent of those appearing before the courts for the disorder were over 40 years old.”

The riots did not happen in Surrey, but came close – to Croydon and Sutton- on the northern border of Surrey.

The experience of the riots prompted Surrey Youth Focus to write to all Surrey MPs inviting their participation in one of two public debates about “Young people and society”. These were arranged for Friday lunchtimes so as to be convenient, it was hoped, for MPs. Whilst all MPs replied and were supportive, it transpired that none were able to attend on the days in question, needing much longer notice than could be provided if the events were to have currency. It was resolved to proceed anyway as it was considered important to hold the debates whilst recent issues were in the public mind.

“Young people and society”:

Clearly young people are part of society, and in Surrey there are some 135,000 young people age 10-19. Evidence from Surrey County Council’s detailed analysis³ of the needs of young people aged 13-19, the traditional age range for youth work, shows that 10% - some 10,000, have considerable needs.

In the run up to the public debates a plethora of national reports were published that suggested there are some difficult issues in our society and in its attitude to vulnerable people:

¹ “The August riots in England – Understanding the involvement of young people”, National Centre for Social Research for Cabinet Office, Oct 2011

² “Statistics Bulletin on the public order of 6-9 August 2011”, Ministry of Justice, 15 Sept.2011

³ “One in ten”, Surrey County Council, 2010

- “Right now thousands of children are being horrifically abused by gangs” – Sue Berelowitz, Deputy Children’s Commissioner⁴
- A Barnados opinion survey showed that half the population has a very negative attitude to young people⁵
- A follow up UNICEF study⁶ on the happiness and well being of young people in the UK compared to those in Sweden and Spain confirmed that young people face considerable peer pressures to conform to commercial trends, or risk bullying, and that parents disproportionately offered material goods to their children who really wanted time with parents and friends.

Finally a report was published into the way in which elderly people are cared for in hospital, which showed a culture of neglect in over half the hospitals surveyed.

The conclusion one might draw is that young people are part of a more fragmented society, and one which is less caring and tolerant than in the past.

Youth unemployment is not yet a particular issue in Surrey, notwithstanding the difficulties at national level, as unemployment in Surrey is still well below a peak reached in November 2010 of just under 4,000; currently the October unemployment (JSA) figure is 3,200. There may be still be some residual benefit from the former Future Jobs Fund, with which many organisations in Surrey engaged (including us) to provide some employment to young people. This is now superseded by the Apprenticeship schemes, and, in a different way, the National Citizenship Scheme.

The format of the debates

Two debates were held. The first was on Friday 21 October from 1.00 – 3.00pm in Guildford at St Saviour’s church in the town centre. Some 65 people attended, including a film crew from Guildford College.

The second was on Friday 25 November at NESCOL FE College in Epsom. This was attended by some 45 people including a group of students from the college, who again filmed the event.

In each case the format was the same: a short opening PowerPoint presentation about “Young people and society “as in this paper, followed by a 7 minute film “Every Piece Matters” produced by the Community Film Unit (a successful social enterprise started up by former Future Jobs Fund trainees engaged by the County Council’s Youth Development Service). The film comprises young people talking to camera about their experience of becoming NEET, and of the pathway to becoming offenders, and how Surrey Care Trust and the Amber Foundation respectively have helped these young people to get their lives back on track.

This then led to an open “Question time” style debate.

⁴ “Child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups”- two year inquiry, Children’s Commissioner

⁵ Barnados ICM Research Poll findings published 3 November 2011

⁶ “Children’s well-being in UK, Sweden and Spain: the role of inequality and materialism”, UNICEF, June 2011

The following is a summary of the principal themes that emerged over the two hours of each debate; it does not purport to be a verbatim account.

Summary of Proceedings- Guildford event

The Guildford panel comprised:

- Surrey County Council- Cllr Kay Hammond (Cabinet Member Community Safety)
- Guildford Borough Council- Cllr Stephen Mansbridge (Lead Councillor for Stronger Communities) but unavailable on the day
- Surrey Youth Consortium – Jenny Griffiths OBE (Independent Chair of Consortium)
- Surrey Police – Inspector Jim Strugnall (Neighbourhood Policing)
- Surrey County Council – Garath Symonds (Assistant Director for Young People)
- Guildford College- Emma Feeley (Student Union President)

The debate was chaired by David Hypher DL, Chairman of Surrey Youth Focus. The cost of the event was sponsored by Guildford Borough Council, to whom we are most grateful.

Inadequacy of provision for young people

The debate opened with the contention that some young people in Gomshall were misbehaving and setting fire to cars because of boredom, the lack of activities for them and the inaccessibility of buses/ trains to other locations.

In reply it was suggested that setting fire to cars was evidence of a more serious issue than just boredom, and in any event there were loads of activities and provision for young people in Surrey. The difficulty was in ensuring that young people find out about what's available, and SCC had just in the process of letting a "youth engagement " contract to achieve that. In addition funding of around £100,000 was being provided to each of the County Council's 11 Local Committees to support additional preventative services. Reference was made to the previous attempt at creating a website (Go to do?) to provide advice to young people and this had been both costly and unsuccessful. Agreeing, Garath Symonds said that in drawing up the new contract for youth engagement young people had been closely involved.

In further debate it was suggested that the withdrawal of the Connexions service was a considerable loss as Connexions workers connected young people up to activities and services. The reply was that councils have to prioritise and that universal services are no longer affordable, so priority is given to the "1 In 10" needy young people (10,000 in total) referred to in the opening presentation. More over there was no evidence that the Connexions spending had actually been effective in achieving its objectives for young people aged 1-19, so the focus was now on students in school and college.

Janet Maines (40 Degreez) observed that her organisation worked with needy young people but a closer youth centre base than just Haslemere in Waverley district was needed. In response Garath Symonds said that services were not being withdrawn, and that no youth workers were being made redundant, with workers in Farnham, Cranleigh and Godalming. The Chairman of Barn Youth Project said that their funding (in a high need ward in Guildford) was drying up, despite having 300 young people on their books and they may have to close. Garath Symonds was aware of this but said that the need would still be met though through a different provider under contract. The voluntary sector needed to look for new income streams if unsuccessful (or ineligible) in bidding for contracts.

Volunteering

It was suggested that there were difficulties in recruiting volunteers to run activities, especially for uniformed organisations needing regular weekly commitments, although in some cases volunteers were also needed for smaller more discrete one off tasks. It was also suggested that parents should set an example in volunteering.

Emma Feely pointed out that living in Surrey was costly and families needed two incomes, and furthermore young people and students also had to work to meet their costs, so these commitments did not readily support volunteering, valuable though it is.

Education

A questioner referred to the way in which several of the young people in the film had not been served well at school, and in what way would the new Academies help fill this deficiency?

In reply it was pointed out that Surrey has a pretty good education system, with schools' results above the national and regional average. It was too early to comment on the contribution of Academies. Emma Feeley thought that there was too much emphasis on academic targets (5+ GCSE passes) and not enough on the distance travelled academically in a value added approach.

Social issues – early intervention

A magistrate commented on the illustration from the film that young people needed support to access jobs, housing, and mentoring/advice.

Agreeing, Jenny Griffiths said that Surrey was fortunate in having a strong voluntary youth sector, but there was an important relationship that needed to be more evident between the State- young people- communities- voluntary organisations. The film illustrated the issues for young people who were marginalised really well – family breakdown and resultant housing, drug and alcohol issues leading into offending behaviour. All the evidence was that young people needed individual support to get through such problems otherwise the risk was of marginalised young people feeling –“I don't care about myself, and therefore you (society) don't matter.”

It was also pointed out that the risk of focus solely on the 10% with high needs that mainstream young people might be that others miss out of learning opportunities and accreditation. The Chairman pointed out that Dame Anne Owers (former Chief Inspector of Prisons) had said that 90% of the prison population had been excluded from school, and that prison was not a great place to begin learning.

Emma Feeley said she had once dropped out, but was now strongly supported in College. She cited the importance of identifying and maintaining behavioural boundaries, and carrying out sanctions if these were broken. There were too many inconsequential warnings given and a lack of enforcement of boundaries. There had to be a moral consensus about actions and consequences in schools and colleges if they were to provide the right conditions for the studying of core subjects like Maths and English.

Referring to the UNICEF report a questioner noted the importance of the 8-13 age group and the need for the whole family to be valued. Agreeing, a youth worker suggested that whole family support was needed, and questioned whether the Government's greater emphasis on discipline was likely to be effective with NEET young people.

Kay Hammond agreed on the importance of parents and whole family approaches. Surrey CC had a particular responsibility to those looked after children for which it was the corporate parent.

Jim Strugnall pointed to the value of restorative justice as an approach to making reparation for offending behaviour. Early intervention was key, and the High Sheriff's Youth Awards (grant scheme) promoted preventative approaches.

Tim Bevans (Guildford College) had discerned consistent messages about the impotence of communication, travel issues, the exercise of choice and the need for strong occupational choices for those age 14-19. How could these be taken forward? In response it was suggested that leadership from all concerned was needed and partnership working. It was affirmed that difficulties in travel were a major issue for young people.

Conclusions

The Chairman asked each panel member to sum up the key points that had emerged from the debate for them:

Garath Symonds:

- the importance of leadership,
- clear vocational pathways
- innovation.

Emma Feeley:

- the importance of young people being self- motivated
- addressing the problems of young people in travelling to access services

Kay Hammond:

- the importance of partnership

Jenny Griffiths:

- the importance of the underlying social values mentioned several times by Emma
- the place of discipline, and the role of family and community
- need for strong voluntary sector provision in each community,
- the emphasis had to be on appropriate local solutions.

Jim Strugnall:

- key was to inspire young people to help themselves,
- promoting and celebrating the positive things young people do against an often hostile media.

Chairman: Thanked the audience for participating, and the panel for its contribution. Guildford Borough Council and Surrey County Council were thanked as sponsors, and so too was St. Saviour's Church as our hosts.

Summary of proceedings – NESOCOT event

The NESOCOT event was funded by Epsom Borough Council, and we are grateful to the Borough Council and to NESOCOT for hosting the event.

The panel on this occasion comprised:

- Surrey County Council- Cllr. Tim Hall, Cabinet Member Children and Learning
- Epsom and Ewell Borough Council- Cllr. Clive Woodbridge, Chairman of Residents Association (Majority Group)
- Surrey Youth Consortium – Jenny Griffiths OBE (Independent Chair of Consortium)
- Surrey Police – Chief Supt Gavin Stephens (Neighbourhood Policing)
- Surrey County Council – Garath Symonds (Assistant Director for Young People)
- Representative of young people: Ben Fowler, student, NESOCOT

The panel was again chaired by David Hypher.

Big Society/ role of communities/ personal responsibilities: It was suggested by a questioner that the Government should not be expected to do everything but that communities should fill gaps and a greater degree of personal responsibility be exercised. A development of this viewpoint was the contention that there was a lack of parental support in the upbringing of children and young people, and a loss of manners

In response it was agreed that parental responsibility was key in bringing up children and young people, and establishing socialisation and manners. Maybe children looked to their mothers for the early nurturing role, and then age 5-11 to fathers for development, and in adolescence to peers and community. The early years and the contribution of parents was crucial, though it was noted that even for supportive parents much could be “lost in translation” in communicating with young people, so the situation was complex.

Work Experience: The students at NESOCOT raised the difficulty they were experiencing in gaining work experience placements, particularly in the caring and health sector. One student recounted how she had made unsuccessful approaches to 17 dental practices to get experience. The collective experience of the student group was that direct approaches to employers, by email/p phone/letter /in person were not working.

This became a dominant theme of the debate especially when linked to the difficulty of volunteering. A student pointed to the Catch 22 of needing work experience to get a job, but how could this be done when employers wanted experienced staff?

In response it was suggested that personal and social networks were key and that the college could help in building links to employers. Moreover elected councillors at all levels (county, district and parish) want to help constituents and earn votes. One contributor suggested that companies in Surrey were in fact very active in going into schools, but that they do so in pursuance of the bottom line, and maybe the way forward is to market oneself to companies on an on going , relational basis.

It was pointed out from the floor that if you lived in a deprived area it was very difficult to have access to the “right people” in a social network who could provide access to employment or work placement opportunities. In response it was suggested that young people should use social network links and be assiduous in using key gatekeepers they might know - like secretaries, receptionists, porters, door – keepers. The message from the panel was: “use your contacts”.

Whilst noting that Surrey Police had dropped its work experience programme, it was thought that there was a need to cultivate links between schools/colleges and employers. Surrey CC and Epsom BC had both taken on young people as Apprentices. It was pointed out (Beccy Bowden of Surrey SATRO) that thousands of companies go into schools to help students both as mentors and to build school/business partnerships, but this was often done from a “bottom line perspective. So maybe young people need to respond more positively and assertively by arguing what they can contribute to that bottom line.

Volunteering/ Life skills

The debate widened out to a consideration of the value, and yet the difficulty of volunteering. The example of Doug in the film was quoted – he lacked personal resources (kicked out of home at 14) and a charity (Amber Foundation) had helped him get on track as an ex-offender. It was costly to build life skills, and yet Government funding was reduced and this would impact adversely on needy young people.

It was suggested however that volunteering did give life skills. This latter benefit was widely acknowledged, yet it was suggested that young people faced huge pressures to do well at school or college whilst parents were often time pressured because of jobs and family commitments, and so were short of time to contribute to the wider community. The UN reports showed that we substituted material possessions for the time with family that children and young people both wanted and needed.

Education/ student grants

On the subject of the school curriculum it was suggested by Tim Hall that the curriculum was too exam focused, and overly concerned with league tables. He wanted all Surrey schools to be excellent, and this was about setting aspirations, and providing leadership and being an exemplar. Mentoring of young people was an important and proven approach. Students mentioned concern about the cost of university education and the loss of the education maintenance allowance.

Early intervention

A questioner was suggested that more early intervention was needed – head teachers know who “the problem kids are” and these should be targeted. This led to a wider debate about the riots and the prominence given to misbehaviour rather than to the good work of young people.

In response it was suggested that the pupil premium would help provide additional resources to the students and schools that had higher needs. Examples were given of how voluntary sector organisations ran schemes that were aimed at breaking the cycle of dependency, and raised the self- esteem of young people.

Conclusions:

The Chairman asked each panellist to summarise the key themes from their viewpoint, and these were:

Clive Woodbridge:

- Students wanting access to work experience and a fair chance to gain employment
- The negative portrayal of young people in the media

Garath Symonds:

- The importance of volunteering and mentoring and promoting aspirations – he hoped a latter debate could be about how to do this.

Ben Fowler:

- The main point for him was the difficulty students experienced in gaining work placements

Jenny Griffiths:

- Agreed that the main theme was about getting work experience
- But also about making connections, linking activities and programmes together
- Finally the importance of people engaging with each other as responsible citizens

Tim Hall:

- Agreed about the work experience point which he undertook to re-consider how the Council might help address
- Also shared the concern about media images, and also misinformation – “poor students” would **not** be paying £9,000pa in academic fees at university

Gavin Stephens:

- Thought early intervention was the key, and listening to young people – in which respect Surrey Police were undertaking a survey of the attitudes of young people.

Chairman- David Hypher:

- Pointed to the difficulties for young people not in the mainstream but with special education needs, or who were marginalised – “difficult to reach”
- Alluding to the opening film, it was evident that prison was an expensive failure, and that other approaches were needed, such as the current Peterborough prison social impact bond (payment by results) and early intervention
- The Chairman thanked our hosts at NESOT, and particularly Cliff Hall (Vice-Principal), the panellists, the audience, the Community Film Unit, and our sponsors – Epsom Borough Council and Surrey County Council.

ENDS.