Children and Young People Select Committee

Review of Bullying

March 2007

Children and Young People Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
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Foreword

This review was undertaken primarily because bullying had been shown to be a major cause of concern for young people in the borough in several different consultations. The Committee is aware that for young people a year is a long time and can seem like an eternity when things are not going well. Consequently we were keen to begin to address their concerns as soon as possible and decided to try a different style of review to those carried out previously.

The Committee was provided with existing policy documents and background information in advance. A full day was arranged in order to hear evidence and then formulate recommendations. This enabled the entire review to be carried out in a short space of time and ensured that Committee Members heard all the evidence before discussing possible recommendations for Cabinet approval. The recommendations will be reported to Stockton Youth Assembly and to Stockton Campus Youth Forum and their comments will be taken into account when monitoring the progress of the Action Plan.

The Committee recognised the enthusiasm and commitment of officers and school staff who gave evidence. It was apparent that there is a real will to deal effectively with the issues, but that a lack of statistics across the borough makes it difficult to target resources and monitor their effectiveness. It is hoped that the implementation of the recommendations of this report will enable better recording and effective use of resources so that young people will begin to feel safer, both in and out of school, and will be better able to enjoy the activities on offer and to achieve their full potential.

We would like to thank
   o   All who gave evidence and contributed to the review.
   o   Graham Birtle who did so much background research and organisation to enable the review to happen within the time available and Fiona Shayler who supported the committee through its meetings and the full day review.
   o   Members of the committee, including the co-opted members, who contributed so enthusiastically to the day.

Councillor Mrs Rigg Chair – Children and Young People Select Committee

Councillor Jones Vice-Chair – Children and Young People Select Committee

Original Brief

Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?
All children and young people in Stockton-on-Tees should be assured of: o living in a safe and secure community where they are protected from harm, abuse, harassment, exploitation or neglect and have the chance to enjoy the opportunity to grow-up with their peer groups and friends.   (Children and Young People's Plan 2006-2009)

What are the main issues?
School Governing bodies must by law have a policy to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils.   Bullying figures may not be recorded in preference for alternative headings

The Thematic Select Committee's overall AIM in doing this work is:
Improve recording and awareness of bullying in Stockton schools.   Stimulate appropriate actions within schools.

The main OBJECTIVES are:
Recording accurately incidences of bullying.

The possible OUTPUTS (changes in service delivery) are:
Greater attention given to overcome incidences of bullying.

The desirable OUTCOMES (benefits to the community) are:
Reduced occurrences of bullying amongst children and young people.

What specific value can scrutiny add to this topic?
Increased awareness of and greater publicity for tackling bullying.

Who will the panel be trying to influence as part of their work?
Schools (Teachers / Governors); CESC; Safeguarding Board; Children's Trust Board

What secondary/existing information do we need? (include here background information, existing reports, updated reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.)
Children and Young People's Plan 2006-2009; BULLYING IN SCHOOLS - Developing a Policy; BULLYING IN SCHOOLS - A positive Approach - Guidelines on Managing Bullying; BULLYING IN SCHOOLS – Resources; BULLYING TODAY: A Report by the Office of the Children's Commissioner;

Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member/portfolio holder, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)
Anti-Bullying Officer; Manager of Specialist Learning Support and P Ed Psych; Head of Strategy, CESC; Head Teachers; Governors.

What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?
Application of policies

How will we monitor progress and measure the success of the review?
Second stage of review – to engage with children and young people regarding how best to tackle incidences of bullying.

1.0   Executive Summary

1.1   Bullying has remained an intractable problem for young people that can have a debilitating effect for those subjected to systematic and regular torment and hurt.

1.2   The Committee was keen to learn from education professionals what actions were being undertaken to reduce the likelihood or effects of bullying for young people in the borough. The Committee was especially pleased to hear the views from representatives of Stockton's Youth Assembly and Stockton Community Campus Youth Forum that attended the evidence gathering event.

1.3   The introduction of an Anti-Bullying Officer and subsequently increased partnership agency involvement organised through an Anti-Bullying Working Party is advancing a variety of initiatives all of which are meant to reduce the incidences of bullying.

1.4   Whilst schools may record bullying episodes such information is difficult to access so this review has been unable to ascertain the level of bullying and therefore the number of people it is affecting. However, surveys of young people tend to identify bullying as the major problem that affects them either directly or indirectly.

1.5   Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is to begin to utilise an Internet based system that will begin to record the information that the Committee asked to receive at the beginning of this review. Whilst the Committee would welcome such information it raised a number of concerns regarding the quality of the data and issues about data protection.

1.6   This review concentrated on policy and procedural issues and it is intended to determine their effectiveness by discussing such issues with more young people in the future.

2.0   Introduction

2.1   The Anti-Bullying Alliance has produced an Anti-Bullying Toolkit for Local Authorities which provides assistance for all local authorities and Children's Trusts to take a strategic approach to bullying.   The following excerpt provides an introduction to an issue that was brought to the attention of the Select Committee by Stockton Council's Head of Children and Young People's Strategy.

> "Bullying causes harm to those who bully, those who are bullied and those who watch. Being bullied undermines self-esteem and confidence, sometimes with devastating consequences. Bullying can result in long-term psychological harm and, in extreme cases, self-harm and suicide. It undermines the ability to concentrate and learn and can impact on a child's or young person's chances of achieving their full potential at school and later in life. Local authorities therefore have a crucial role to play in helping schools and community groups to prevent bullying, respond immediately to incidents and provide longer-term support for both the person being bullied, to rebuild their confidence and self-esteem, as well as the person who is bullying, to change their behaviour and address any underlying emotional issues.
>
> Bullying is recognised as a major issue within schools and other organisations working with young people. The profile of bullying – and what can be done to tackle it – has never been higher. New legislation and policy guidance mean that local authorities are under considerable pressure to deliver an effective, coordinated response to bullying across schools and other organisations within their area."

2.2   The limited amount of time available to the Committee to investigate this issue resulted in a meeting/seminar to allow the Committee to take evidence from education professionals, young people and others in order to focus on two key areas:

o   Improve recording and awareness of bullying in Stockton schools.
o   Stimulate appropriate actions within schools.

2.3   The Anti-Bullying Alliance in its toolkit highlights the need for improved recording and awareness stating that "…[the] focus on reporting and monitoring reinforces the need for better use, and gathering, of data. It also stresses the need for authorities to promote the reporting of bullying and harassment. This makes local authorities, schools and all relevant agencies jointly responsible for recording bullying incidents and making available annual statistics. It is also expected that local authorities will consult annually with children and young people about whether they have been bullied."

2.4   The Committee was keen to learn that all the relevant agencies working with children and young people are ensuring that:

o   children and young people are encouraged to report bullying and discrimination, and know that they will be listened to
o   those who are victims of bullying and harassment are given support
o   those who bully and discriminate against others are given support
o   there is regular monitoring of incidents of bullying and harassment, and reporting to responsible bodies (for example, school governors)
o   there are Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) programmes that deal with bullying and discrimination.

3.0 Background

3.1 The prevalence of bullying in schools is recognised by most people. It was not until the 1990s that research of the topic provided the systematic investigation that has confirmed that it is a pervasive phenomenon. It was at this time that many parents and teachers became more determined that action needed to be taken.

3.2 The inability to eradicate bullying completely means that it is still the issue most likely to be the cause of problems for young people that they seek help for from adults whether in school or from agencies such as Childline.

3.3 Between April 2003 and March 2003 bullying accounted for 18 per cent of Childline's calls, the highest percentage of the categories recorded.

3.4 800 responses to the EZEE questionnaire aimed at young people in Stockton Borough in 2005 gave the following results

   o Nearly a ¼ of young people say their school doesn't do anything if they tell them about bullying.
   o Almost ¼ of the young people felt that more should be done to stop bullying in school.
   o Over ¾ of the young people think more should be done to stop bullying out of school.
   o Just over a third of the young people say they are picked on because they are different.
   o ¼ of the young people say they are picked on because of their race, religion or disability.

3.5 In November 2006 the Office of the Children's Commissioner published a report about bullying as this was the item that produced the largest single number of responses to an online survey. The report noted that:

> "England's first large-scale anti-bullying project - the Sheffield Project - established the basic template for practice still used today. Its key finding was that whole school commitment to an inclusive whole school policy is the main factor determining the level of success. Some of the challenges it identified, such as the comparative difficulty of changing behaviour among older children, and the different behaviours of girls and boys, are still issues that practitioners and policy makers need to address.
>
> Definitions have evolved, but the majority include all or most of the following elements:
>
> - Aggression
> - Intentional hurtfulness
> - Abuse of power (asymmetric conflict)
> - Repetition
>
> These are included in what is probably the most comprehensive definition, by the Australian academic Ken Rigby:

Bullying involves a desire to hurt + hurtful action + a power imbalance + (typically) repetition + an unjust use of power + evident enjoyment by the aggressor and generally a sense of being oppressed on the part of the victim.

The 'hurtful action' can take numerous forms, such as name-calling, verbal abuse, spreading of rumours, malicious use of communications technology, ostracising, attacks on property or persons. These hurtful actions can be conducted one-to-one, or a group may persecute an individual or another group."

3.6 Bullying continues to have a national profile with the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee undertaking an inquiry into bullying investigating the extent and nature of the problem of bullying in schools, its effects on those involved and how it can best be tackled.

3.7 The terms of reference for the inquiry includes:

Extent and nature of the problem
How bullying should be defined
The extent and nature of the problem of bullying in schools
The extent of homophobic and racist bullying
Why some people become bullies and why some people are bullied
The effect of bullying on those who bully

Tackling the problem
How schools deal with bullying
How parents can help if their children are being bullied or are bullying others
What support and guidance the DfES provides to schools and to those affected by bullying, and how effective they are
The role of other organisations, such as non-governmental groups, in providing support
To what extent schools can be responsible for bullying that takes place off their premises and how they can deal with it
Whether particular strategies need to be used to tackle homophobic and racist bullying

3.8 The House of Commons Select Committee reported its findings on 27 March 2007.

4.0 Evidence/Findings

4.1 Bullying within Stockton's schools is taken very seriously by all educational practitioners. Stockton's Children, Education and Social Care Department (CESC) employs an Anti-Bullying Officer to provide an anti-bullying service into the primary and secondary schools in the borough.

4.2 This has lead to developments within CESC which will see the review of the current policy and procedure that operates. The Select Committee was therefore keen to be involved at this stage to get an understanding of the issues and provide its support and recommendations to possible improvements to this necessary service.

4.3 The success of the anti-bullying service relies heavily on the partnership working arrangements that continue to be developed with schools, the youth service, school councils and many other agencies.

4.4 A multi-disciplinary Anti-Bullying Working Party has operated since March 2005 which aims to share good practice and keep updated about local, regional and national initiatives. Other aims and objectives include:

o Establishing working in partnership projects across the authority to implement anti-bullying projects
o Considering ways forward in recording incidents of bullying of all forms, in accordance with Ofsted requirements
o Considering the training needs and provision for primary and secondary schools and partnerships within the next academic year
o Piloting and reviewing primary school resources such as 'What's the score' and 'Bullying Matters'
o Considering and trialling the Draw and Write research technique as a consultative and evaluation process with children
o Forming and fostering a working alliance with local arts organisations as a means to improve playground environments and to enhance creativity and the imagination as skills in building Emotional Literacy with pupils
o Considering and planning a series of local events for the National Anti-Bullying Week held annually in November.

4.5 The Committee learned that Stockton's increasing awareness and involvement in attempting to reduce the incidences of bullying has been advanced by the close co-operation and working arrangements with Val McFarlane at Durham County Council and the Anti-Bullying Alliance.

4.6 Durham started an Anti-Bullying Service in 1992 which has grown, with financial provision from the European Social Fund, to provide a team of 10 staff to address the issue. The size of this team allows them to deliver the services into other areas.

4.7 The introduction of an accreditation scheme has seen improvements in tackling bullying in schools in the Durham area as it helps identify and then use good practice whilst providing a mechanism for support and improvement. The scheme is backed by Childline, NSPCC and the Healthy Schools Programme and is also recognised by DfES and the Anti-Bullying Alliance as a model of good practice. Accreditation is mainstream funded so ensuring no cost of accreditation to individual school budgets.

4.8 The scheme which is being introduced into Stockton's Schools requires the schools to follow a process and meet criteria similar to that developed in Durham.

4.9 The process consists of:

o A request for assistance or accreditation by a school;
o The production of a portfolio of evidence showing how the school is addressing bullying;
o A multi-agency panel examines the portfolio;
o The school is visited; and
o If meeting the required standard a school is awarded a certificate and Kite Mark.

4.10 The criteria that the school needs to meet includes:

o A focus group consisting of pupils, staff (including senior management), outside agencies and parent governors needs to meet regularly and produce agendas and minutes to provide evidence of meetings;
o An anti-bullying policy written by the focus group needs to be annually reviewed;
o Information must be shown to be passed to and from parents regarding bullying matters;
o A peer support scheme must be operating;
o The schools need to host an annual awareness raising event; and
o Regular staff training and use of outside agencies must be recorded.

4.11 To ensure that schools maintain their focus on reducing bullying incidences the accreditation is awarded annually thereby ensuring the importance placed on schools to tackle the pernicious actions that bullying contains.

4.12 The Committee was pleased to learn that two schools in Stockton had recently been awarded accreditation. Shoni Bason at Village Primary School and Lorraine Lucas, Learning Mentor at Northfield School and Sports College were amongst a number of school representatives that gave evidence.

4.13 Ms Bason informed the Committee about procedures that deal with incidents of bullying including a Several Times On Purpose (STOP) box where youngsters can write about the issues affecting them and post them in the box. An adult empties the box each evening and will deal with the incidents within 24 hours. An email address has also been set up so children and parents can email in with any concerns.

4.14 The school also works closely with the surrounding community forming a multi-agency group including police, local community members, Tristar homes ltd, healthy schools, parents and governors. These members meet once a term to address bullying issues in the wider area outside the school.

4.15 Northfield School and Sports College, in Billingham, pioneered work on Anti-bullying with the development of Peer Supporter and Peer Mentor schemes.

4.16 The School initially worked with ChildLine who delivered training on a weekly basis to a group of 35 pupils enabling them to become Peer Supporters,

acting as the support network for pupils that have experienced bullying or 'fall-outs' within friendship groups.

4.17   The peer supporters successfully produced a video depicting various acts of bullying around school which was shown to all year groups and is used during induction days to reassure new pupils measures are in place to help anyone who feels bullied or intimidated.

4.18   The school created a number of ways for pupils to report acts of bullying including a website and the Blue Box, where pupils can post any acts of bullying anonymously.

4.19   A Guide for Parents was also produced detailing what they should do if they suspect that their child might be the victim of bullying, clearly showing the measures the school has in place to deal with bullying.

4.20   Representation also came from Mill Lane School, Yarm Primary School, Fairfield Primary School and Ingleby Mill Primary School. The Committee was interested to hear that all the schools are advancing their schemes to tackle bullying but recognise they are at different stages regarding their readiness for accreditation. **The Committee recommend that every effort is made to encourage Stockton's schools to work with the Anti-Bullying Officer to achieve accreditation status annually**.

4.21   The positive effect of accreditation the Committee believes could be beneficial in other areas of young peoples lives. **The Committee recommends that where suitable the accreditation scheme be extended to run at establishments other than schools to ensure young people have the highest level of protection from bullying**.

4.22   The Committee learned of a number of local initiatives that have been introduced. The 'Oasis of Calm' provides children with a peaceful and calm place that can give them an escape from stresses they may be experiencing. It also offers a creative space with help from an artist in residence and can be provided either outside or indoors. See Box 1 for further information provided by the Anti-Bullying Service.

4.23   A number of schools are involved in a 'Massage in Schools' project which shares the vision of the Massage in School Programme Association in that the programme offers every child attending school experiences a "…positive and nurturing touch every day." Each of Stockton schools involved in the programme that gave evidence reported the positive effect it is having on pupils.

4.24   The programme only operates in primary schools and once learned by the pupils is practiced on each other. Parents have also been able to experience the effects of massage at Ingleby Mill Primary School and gave very positive feedback. It was reported that in the two weeks it has operated at Fairfield Primary School the project has had a noticeably positive effect on the behaviour and attention span of pupils.

Box 1

An outdoor Oasis of calm

Hopes for this space

o A positive place for pupils to take time out to just 'be' in
o A place that children can retreat to for some peace and calm
o A place that children can choose to go to when they are about to 'blow their top' and manage these angry feelings safely and effectively
o A space in the schoolyard that is beautiful, soothing and relaxing to both be in and to look at
o A creative space that pupils can help create with the artist in residence
o A place in school that pupils are proud of and keen to maintain as a clean and calm area due to their involvement in creating this space
o Initially to create this area outside and eventually to have an indoor space which would incorporate more textiles and be known as the 'comfort zone'

An indoor Comfort Zone

4.25 The evidence received showed good practice in both primary and secondary schools. It is important that the transition between the different school levels is managed appropriately as this is a time that bullying could occur when young people are experiencing a huge change in their school career. In order to reduce incidences of bullying at this time **the Committee recommend that primary schools ensure that all appropriate information regarding issues of bullying as it has affected year 6 pupils is shared with relevant secondary schools prior to the end of the school year to aid the transition of pupils**.

Measuring Incidents

4.26 A major issue for the Committee was the level of bullying incidents that occur in Stockton Borough. A request for that information was made but could not be provided as currently CESC does not collect such information.

4.27 In order to address an issue for which no measurement is currently available the Committee learned that an audit was taking place during March 2007 and that computer software developed to record and report episodes of bullying is to be trialled in a number of Stockton schools prior to purchase.

4.28 Sentinel, an Internet based data capture tool developed by Vantage Technologies is intended to provide a centralised method which will record and report bullying within Stockton for the first time. Such records will begin to provide education professionals with statistical data that can be used initially to quantify the level of bullying and then determine the effectiveness of methods aimed at reducing incidences for young people.

4.29 Stockton Council joins up to 40 local authorities involved in piloting the Internet system which provides online incidence reporting recording the type of behaviour that has been experienced or observed. This will allow Stockton

to develop web pages to suit the recording fields that is felt necessary to capture all of the relevant data.

4.30 The Committee was concerned that the introduction of any system should be fully consulted on prior to introduction and is not aware that this has taken place for the software being trialled. The Committee wants to ensure that Stockton's schools are all willing participants in any centralised recording system. It is therefore recommended that **consultation takes place with all Stockton Borough schools and trade unions to determine the level of support for the introduction of any centralised recording system**.

4.31 With anonymity of reporting bullying it is expected this will increase the likelihood of incidences being submitted on the system. In turn it is likely to increase the overall figures of bullying in the borough as observed in the other local authority areas already trialling the system but it is expected that figures would subsequently begin to reduce with the anti-bullying measures taking effect.

4.32 The Committee was pleased to be able to see a demonstration of the system and whilst considering it technical on first viewing understands that with regular use the ease of operation would improve. However, the Committee did raise a number of concerns of operating such a system that it would expect to be resolved prior to purchase.

4.33 If the definition of bullying differs between schools then this has the potential of undermining any recording system as it requires an agreed definition to be reached that will standardise the recording. At present it is a requirement of schools to determine their own definition of bullying. **The Committee recommends that the Government and Council definitions of bullying be circulated to school governing bodies for consideration for inclusion in their school policy.** This might then begin to constitute the development of a borough-wide definition of bullying ahead of the introduction of any recording system. The Committee intend as part of its monitoring of the report recommendations to have discussions with school governing bodies to determine the progress and likelihood of achieving standardised measures that define bullying in Stockton Borough.

4.34 The Committee is concerned that a system to record incidences of bullying is basing figures on accusations rather than fully investigated and proven cases of bullying. **The Committee recommends that performance data taken from the system should be anonymous**.

4.35 In addition to the recording of allegations **the Committee recommends that the accused person's name in all unproven cases of bullying be removed from the system at the conclusion of an investigation**. Committee members are aware of web sites that have been developed that allow uncorroborated allegations to be made and therefore want to ensure that Sentinel operates to the highest standard possible of data protection protocols.

4.36 Proven cases of bullying should have a limited lifespan on any recording system as this will allow for changed behaviour not to be affected by previous unsuitable behaviour. **The Committee recommend that recorded incidences of bullying be removed from the system's records after a period of time (to be determined) if such behaviour has not continued**.

5.0   Conclusion

5.1   The Committee welcomed the opportunity to investigate the issue of bullying aware of the limitations to influence such a long-term problem.

5.2   Recognition should be given to Stockton's Anti-Bullying Service in providing advancement in addressing incidences of bullying in the borough and supplying professional support to Stockton's schools.

5.3   The Committee was pleased to learn of the priority being given by dedicated officers within Stockton's schools and the number of initiatives being introduced to tackle this pervasive problem.   In particular, the move to accreditation for schools should ensure the highest standards are met to counteract the harmful effects that bullying causes.

5.4   The lack of accurate statistics to determine the propensity of bullying is a serious issue that needs to be addressed.   The purchase of a dedicated system to collect such figures begins to tackle some of the concerns but also raises other concerns highlighted in this report.   The Committee hopes that its views are considered in order to improve the data collection.

5.5   The Committee in the future plans to talk to more young people than was able to attend this review so that it can determine the effectiveness of anti-bullying strategies from those the strategies are meant to help.

6.0 Recommendations

The Committee recommends that:

Every effort is made to encourage Stockton's schools to work with the Anti-Bullying Officer to achieve accreditation status annually. (para 4.20; pg 19)

Where suitable the accreditation scheme be extended to run at establishments other than schools to ensure young people have the highest level of protection from bullying. (para 4.21; pg 19)

Primary schools ensure that all appropriate information regarding issues of bullying as it has affected year 6 pupils is shared with relevant secondary schools prior to the end of the school year to aid the transition of pupils. (para 4.25; pg 20)

Consultation takes place with all Stockton Borough schools and trade unions to determine the level of support for the introduction of any centralised recording system. (para 4.30 ; pg 21)

The Government and Council definitions of bullying be circulated to school governing bodies for consideration for inclusion in their school policy. (para 4.33; pg 21)

Performance data taken from the system should be anonymous. (para 4.34; pg 21)

The accused person's name in all unproven cases of bullying must be removed from the system at the conclusion of an investigation. (para 4.35; pg 21)

Recorded incidences of bullying be removed from the system's records after a period of time (to be determined) if such behaviour has not continued. (para 4.36; pg 21)