

# Outcomes from the Youth Commission's Big Conversation:

From July 2013 – February 2014, Hampshire's Youth Commission (pilot phase) held the **Big Conversation** with over **2000** young people aged between 14-25 years from our region to explore how young people feel about **preventing** and responding to **five issues** that might affect them and share their **recommendations**

# Issue 1: Domestic abuse

## Observations:

- Sexual assaults are now seen as the 'norm' and culturally acceptable
- There was a reluctance to report abuse
- A lack of confidence in the police and social services to respond effectively

## Root causes:

- Power and control
- Fear of a relationship splitting up
- Alcohol and drug addiction
- Violent upbringings
- A lack of education about healthy relationship
- Mental illness and anger issues

## Key recommendations:

1. More education in school on healthy relationships and 'red flags' to be aware of in relationships.
2. More encouragement and support for young people to report abuse.
3. More collaboration between agencies such as police and social services.

# Issue 2: ASB

## Observations:

- Young people feel they are unfairly accused of anti-social behaviour and are just as concerned as older people about ASB
- They are just as concerned as older people about ASB
- They feel unsafe in public places and intimidated by the ASB displayed by some older people
- A general lack of understanding of the definition of ASB and expected behaviours - it was too widely accepted in society and by relevant authorities.

## Root causes:

- Boredom
- Peer pressure
- Drugs and alcohol abuse
- The desire for status from peers
- A lack of understanding of the consequences and too widely accepted in society
- Family background

## Key recommendations:

1. Tackle stereotyping
2. More police on foot patrols
3. Clearer definition of what is and what is not ASB
4. More places for young people to go, such as Youth Zones

# Issue 3: Drug and alcohol abuse

## Observations:

- Violence and intimidating behaviour being displayed by those under the influence of alcohol and drugs
- Young people in secondary schools and colleges buying, using and selling drugs
- Dealers targeting young people in order to sell drugs within their peer groups

## Root causes:

- Peer pressure and social expectations: drug and alcohol abuse being seen as the 'social norm'
- Boredom: Temptation to abuse alcohol and drugs to fill a gap in their lives because there's nothing else to do
- Lack of understanding of real life consequences of d&a abuse - not being perceived as a health and wellbeing problem but a being driven underground as a criminal issue, i.e. criminalising young people.

## Key recommendations:

1. Tackle the root causes and provide much earlier support (e.g. early rehab, peer group and family counselling)
2. Encourage people whose lives have been harmed by drugs and alcohol to talk to young people about the dangers of abuse
3. Increase education in schools using different methods to get the message across, including arts, drama, sports and the science curriculum

# Issue 4: Reducing offending and reoffending among young people

## Observations:

- Important to understand that offenders are people too who are often lost, unsupported with no one to turn to or confide in or angry

## Root causes:

- Boredom and peer pressure combined with a lack of places to go - especially for the young adult age group between 14-16 years and upwards
- There is a strong emotional context to youth crime: the role that anger, frustration and family breakdown play in causing young people to offend/reoffend
- Low esteem and low aspiration
- Young offenders felt victimised and labelled as a result of their criminal convictions - making it difficult to find work and tempting to go back to crime.
- They felt the police would persecute them as a result of their history.
- They also felt there was a lack of effective support for young people who have offended.

## Key recommendations:

- 1. New education initiative to enable young people to learn about the law and consequences
- 2. Grown up spaces for young adults to gather and have fun in safe places
- 3. Mentoring scheme - ex-offenders to mentor young offenders
- 4. Open days to visit prisons and young offenders institutions
- 5. More funding for charities to provide support to ex-offenders and those at risk

# Issue 5: The relations between young people and the police

## Observations:

- Many young people had positive experiences of the police in their area - esp. in schools - but the lack of interaction with police was raised as a concern and a main barrier to an improved relationship. Some commented that it was only when they ran into problems that they came into contact with the police.
- The stereotyping of young people by the police based on their age and clothing was a major concern for young people. They feel persecuted, moved on or stopped and searched when they are 'hanging around' in groups in public places - there is assumption that they are causing trouble.
- Many young people wanted to know more about their own rights and responsibilities.

## Key recommendations:

1. Do more to highlight the positive work done by the police force and increase the public profile of the police
2. Collaborate with young people to help the police to communicate and engage more effectively
3. Create an opt-in interactive training for police officers wanting to develop their skills in youth engagement

# CONCLUSIONS

The majority of young people:

1. Are part of the solution NOT the problem - they can be part of the fight against crime
2. Are as concerned as older people about all 5 issues
3. Can be the victims of crime as well as the witnesses or perpetrators
4. Want their relationship with the police to improve and for barriers to be removed
5. Want respect but also want to know their responsibilities
6. Need safe places to 'hang out' and express themselves