



POLICING AND CRIME BILL
House of Commons Committee Stage

PART 1: POLICE REFORM

Amendment

Clause 1, page 1, line 8 at end insert-

“(1A) In section 6 of the Police Act 1996 (c.16) after (2) insert-

“(2A) Every police authority must make arrangements to obtain the views of children and young people in their area about policing in that area.” ”

Purpose

This is a probing amendment designed to gain further information from the Government about how the police will canvass public opinion and how specifically this will include the views of children and young people.

Briefing

Clause 1 inserts into the Police Act 1996 a requirement for police authorities, when discharging any of their functions, to have regard to the views of the public concerning policing. This duty is intended to complement the duty of police authorities, under s.96 of the Police Act 1996, to obtain the views of the public concerning policing.

The SCYJ is concerned about how this proposal may impact on children and young people. The Children’s Commissioner for England has referred to a widely held fear of children within our society and the negative portrayal of young people in the media.¹

Children and young people are too often portrayed solely as perpetrators of crime. The latest Concluding observations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Children, published in October 2008 note the very negative coverage on youth issues and recommend that the UK Government *‘take urgent measures to address the intolerance and inappropriate characterization of children, especially adolescents, within the society, including the media’*.

Negative media and the raft of legislative measures to deal with youth crime and anti-social behaviour have created a climate in the society where any children’s activity may be seen as anti-social. For example we are aware of a number of cases in which complaints about anti-social behaviour have turned out to be young people playing football in the park.

In this context there is a significant risk that public opinion (as distinct to informed public judgment), based on negative stereotypes of young people, could result in policing priorities

¹ The UK children’s commissioners report to the UN committee on the rights of the child (2008)

that are skewed against the interests of this group. This could seriously undermine existing multi-agency partnership approaches both within and without the criminal justice sector to tackling youth crime.

The Government's recent Youth Crime Action Plan (YCAP) recognised the high incidence of children and young people, as victims of crime and this must be also be reflected in these provisions. Evidence submitted to The Good Childhood Inquiry, commissioned by The Children's Society illustrated that with children and young people have strong views of what is happening in their local communities in terms of crime and antisocial behaviour.

'When I go out I see so many teenagers swearing and littering. It makes me ask myself if the government realise what goes on.' (11 year-old boy)²

To this end it is vital that consideration is given to the question of how the police will ensure that they obtain the views of children and young people themselves. We know that in the past many Crime and Disorder Partnerships have failed to take into account the views of children and young people in their planning processes. Children and young people are important members of the community and their views and ideas can make a positive contribution to improving community safety.

We urge peers to seek further information from the Government about how the police will canvass public opinion about what policing should focus on and how specifically this will include the views of children and young people.

For further information please contact:

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The **Standing Committee for Youth Justice (SCYJ)** is a membership body which:

- Provides a forum for organisations, primarily in the non-statutory sector, working to promote the welfare of children who become engaged in the youth justice system; and
- Advocates a child-focussed youth justice system that promotes the integration of such children into society and thus serves the best interests of the children themselves and the community at large.

Members are: Action for Children, Association of YOT Managers, Barnardo's, Catch22, Children Law UK/TACT, The Children's Society, Children's Rights Alliance for England, Council for Disabled Children, The Howard League for Penal Reform, Just for Kids Law, JUSTICE, Nacro, National Youth Agency (NYA), National Association for Youth Justice (NAYJ), NCB, NSPCC, The Prince's Trust, Prison Reform Trust, Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, Secure Accommodation Network, SOVA and VOICE.

The contents of this briefing do not necessarily reflect the views of all member organisations

² The Good Childhood® A National Inquiry. Evidence Summary 6: Values. The Children's Society, 2008