

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY MEETING)

WEDNESDAY 17 OCTOBER 2012

PUBLIC QUESTION ON THE THEME

1. QUESTION FROM RICHARD WALKER TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

What is Southwark council doing in response to the level of hate crime endured by young people with learning disabilities?

RESPONSE

We recognise that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities are more at risk of harassment and hate crime than their peers and that this type of crime is often under reported due to the nature of the offences. Young people may not understand or recognise that what is happening to them is a crime and furthermore have difficulty telling people about it. A 'one size fits all' approach is unhelpful when supporting young victims and their families and as such Southwark's approach to tackling this type of hate crime as and when an incident occurs is tailored to each individual case. This will depend for example on the identified needs of the victim, background to the case and the wider circumstances surrounding the incident to ensure that our response is balanced and appropriate.

Southwark council are committed to tackling all forms of hate crime that fall under the six equality strands. The Safer Southwark Partnership (SSP) published the four year hate crime strategy for the borough in 2011. The strategy is available on the Southwark Council website: <http://www.southwark.gov.uk/hatecrime>.

The delivery of the hate crime strategy is overseen by the multi-agency Southwark Hate Crime Network (SHCN). The network is co-ordinated and administered by a community safety officer who supports and maintains an oversight of the hate crime work across the borough. The officer works closely with the co-chairs of the network to ensure the delivery plan remains up to date, that members of the SHCN are accountable for delivering the agreed actions and current priorities around tackling hate crime regionally and locally are reflected.

We are conscious that reported disability hate crime are low with only 6 crimes recorded by the Metropolitan Police Service, between April and October of this year. To increase reporting of disability hate crime, the council in partnership with the SHCN developed the first 'easy read' hate crime document. The document aims to explain the nature of what hate crime is in an easy to understand format and provide details of what to do if you are a victim or indeed witness of hate crime. The easy read document has been distributed and publicised at various community safety events and is available for download on the Southwark Council website: <http://www.southwark.gov.uk/hatecrime>.

Furthermore, the Community Safety Partnership Service (CSPS) is currently liaising with the Fast Forward project in Peckham, a borough-wide project for young adults (11-25) with learning difficulties and disabilities. Through this project, CSPS aims to scope how young people are being affected by hate crime in Southwark, distribute appropriate information and materials to encourage reporting and deliver awareness training sessions where appropriate.

Children and young people with disabilities that significantly impair their functioning are eligible for a social work service from either the children with disabilities team based at Sunshine House or the 14 - 25 transitions team based at the new Queens Road office. Services from these teams are always based on a thorough assessment of need carried out by a social worker. In the course of this assessment the social worker will always consider vulnerability and risk factors and will communicate with the child using the most appropriate means (many of the children and young people we work with have limited speech and ability to communicate so Makaton and other communication methods will often be used). Information, views and feelings will also be obtained from the child's parent(s) or carers. This assessment process therefore provides an opportunity to find out whether there is any question of the young person having been subjected to hate crime, or possibly lesser types of abuse such as bullying and name calling. If it is found that this is an issue it will be addressed in the care plan arising from the assessment.

The council funds a wide range of local voluntary organisations that work closely with disabled children and young people and their parent carers. These services are all provided by staff with specialist training and experience in working with disabled children and these organisations and their staff are aware of the risk of disabled people suffering hate crime and are alert to the signs that a child or young person may be suffering in this way.