

Littleham Community Coming Together - Our Youth Event 20th July 2024

Report and Data Analysis

Background

This local community event was designed and hosted by a group of Littleham residents (calling themselves The Littlehamsters) who have come together, volunteering time to address issues of health and wellbeing on Littleham's local authority built estates with the help of WEB Community Health and Wellbeing Community Board ("WEB") funding. From discussions within the group, with other local residents and with stakeholders between September 2023 and March 2024 they established three main areas that they are keen to address:-

- 1) Anti-social behaviour and youth provision
- 2) The Carers experience
- 3) People don't seem to be using the estates' green spaces – why not?

The theme that was dominant in their minds, prompted by a spate of car vandalism in the area, was that of anti-social behaviour, drug use/dealing and youth service provision and it was decided to take action, in the first instance, on this theme.

Collectively they decided to hold an event to explore this further and met to set themselves some specific objectives:-

To create a relaxed and comfortable, community-led space where residents would feel safe and able to give in depth interviews providing rich qualitative data. Guiding, open questions would be provided asking what anti-social behaviour they are witnessing, how it is affecting them and how best to support Littleham's young people, especially those from the local authority built estates.

To ensure that the families who did attend were locally resident. It was felt to be crucial that the invitation was targeted to those families who live on the Littleham local authority built estates so that their voice could be clearly heard and not diluted by others who do not share the same environmental and social circumstances. The Littlehamsters committed to inviting only those families that they know are resident.

To have local stakeholders in the room including members of the WEB Community Health and Wellbeing Board, the Primary School, College, Neighbourhood Policing Team and the Church.

To set a precedent and formula for this kind of relaxed, family-friendly, community-led liaison event – an Easy Speak Event The Littlehamsters went to some lengths in terms of hosting, decoration and the activities/refreshments provided, to create this. The positive outcome of this would be the creation of a community liaison/consultation format that can be provided by the Littlehamsters again and again.

This report will show that these outcomes were achieved and outlines the data gathered with conclusions and recommendations.

The “Quiet Voice” and research methodology

What sets this liaison/community consultation event apart from others is that it was designed and hosted by the residents themselves. What’s more, those residents were brought together intentionally from the Littleham local authority built estate and from individuals who would not normally take action in this way, i.e. the “Quiet Voice”.

Commissioned by “WEB”, Interwoven Productions CIC used their own unique Quiet Voice Methodology (described fully in Littleham Community Coming Together Interim Report May 2024) to bring together a “Pod” of Littleham estate residents who turned out to be passionate about taking action for the benefit of their community, particularly on the issue of anti-social behaviour and the community stress that it causes. Working under the group name of The Littlehamsters they came together and designed what they believed would be the most conducive event environment to gain in-depth interviews with local families on the *Our Young People* theme.

On the day, the families chose not to be recorded directly and members of the group made extensive notes. They met afterwards to read out and share the notes, and their own reflections and experiences. These reflections were recorded, then transcribed and subject to qualitative analysis. Three families sat with the Littlehamsters at the Event for extended interviews of around 40-50 minutes. JoJo Spinks, a qualified and experienced qualitative researcher, transcribed those reflections for analysis using the Constant Comparative method.

The anonymised transcript coding can be seen in Appendix 2.

In qualitative research, open questions are used to prompt discussion but no assumptions are made beforehand, allowing the responses to speak for themselves. Interviews are a common form of data collection but to reach deeply into this community it was clear that extra attention needed to be paid to creating a safe, comfortable and convivial space. Hosting by residents rather than stakeholders, so that the balance of power and interest in the room could be seen to be equal, was crucial to its success.

The data

The transcripts were broken down into snippets of raw data which were then, compared repeatedly in order to resolve into themes:-

A – Current problems

Abuse and intimidation on the Play Park
Feeling unsafe and stressed
Frustration at lack of response from the Police
Car and other vandalism
Security Cameras
Sense of hopelessness/helplessness
Sense that the offenders are known
Understand youth behaviour – wanting to be 'seen'
Drugs and drug-dealing

B – What used to be good

Youth group provided somewhere to build positive relationships – outside of home and school

C – What is needed

An enhanced childhood experience
An alternative to the influence of mobile phones/social media
Exercise/physical health
Youth clubs/activities to be opened again in Littleham and beyond
Days out to places of interest
Domestic/life skills
Professional supervision/security
Funding
Outreach work/schools involvement
Provision for autism/other special needs
Activities with purpose

A – Current problems – in detail

Vandalism

One of the largest collection of snippets centred around a spate of car vandalism experienced across the estate in April/May/June 2024. Three of the Littlehamsters themselves saw damage, on their own vehicles, to wing mirrors or paintwork and they spoke to several other residents who had the same.

Related to this is a sense of frustration with the police at the lack of response even when video evidence from security cameras was offered.

“she's got a camera on her door, and she said she actually has photographed them vandalizing a car and other things, antisocial things, and she actually gave them to the police, and nothing's been done about it.”

Also related is the belief that the offenders are 'known' both to the police and to the local community. This suggests the opportunity for specific outreach, to be returned to below.

Abuse and anti-social behaviour at the Crescent Play Park

Several residents have noted that there is a group of youngsters who have taken up 'territory' at the newly refurbished Play Park.

“They're not allowing their children to go to the crescent play park at all because there's a group of youngsters, quite young. So they describe them as age 10-12, dominating the play park at the moment, and being very abusive to people who try to play there, so they won't send their children there at all. She witnessed a child being beaten up by another, by one of these youngsters. So physically beaten up, not just verbally abused.”

“At the moment in the park, in Littleham Park, there's teenagers, particularly girls, are intimidating the younger children and adults who are too scared to go in to this lovely new park and the basketball court.”

This may not be unrelated to the fact that usage by families slowed considerably over the winter months because of waterlogging, leaving the space open to be 'claimed' by this group of youngsters. More positively, this also suggests the potential for specific outreach and will be returned to below.

Drug use and dealing

Drug use and dealing wasn't mentioned in the family interviews but was raised in the Littlehamster reflections.

“Yeah, I have seen boys on these little scooters and talking to the like, probably, I'd say, about 13-14, talking to someone on the mobiles. And then they got, they got this very similar sort of style bag. It's about that big, put the phone in it, zip it up, and then, okay, we'll be there in 10-15, minutes.”

Others have noted deals taking place openly on the street.

Interestingly an individual also interacted with Interwoven TikTok posts about Littleham and, on their profile, openly stated that they were dealing using County Lines language. These posts have now been removed, either by the individual or by TikTok, but they were shared with Mark Gerry of Space on 16th July 2025 in order to gain supervisory advice and this is written up in a separate report.

Reflection on the impact of these behaviours appears to fall into two camps:-

a) Feeling unsafe and stressed and the impact of this on health and wellbeing

“Okay, so I talked to a family who were actually from Europe, and they told me that they'd moved from the big city to a smaller place to feel safer. And one of the biggest things that they wanted to say is they don't feel safe. They moved, they moved from a big city in their country, and they wanted to live in a safer place, and they don't feel safe. They don't feel safe.”

“And when a child, a small child, has to live through that, that is like a because you can't relax. And if mum's scared as well, you know, I learned a lot of my anxieties, I think, off my mum, you know, she was very nery about all sorts of things. And I think that sort of, you know, I picked that up and, yeah, I think that's really important.”

Strikingly, one family felt very strongly that there was no hope of change and they would eventually be forced to move to find somewhere safer.

“And when I said, could we support the families to help the youngsters who are causing these problems, they said, You won't change it. And that was really quite profound. They said, No, change. We will probably move. You can't change this. ‘It's the parents, and they don't care’ ”.

And

b) Understanding youth behaviour

Interestingly, among the Littlehamsters, there was extended discussion about trying to understand the reasons behind this behaviour showing an appetite for solution-finding, rather than blame.

“If they can't find positive attention, they look for negative”.

“They want to read, see the social media that something's happened, and then they can, they know it's them”.

They felt that the young people were wanting to be seen.

B – What used to be good – in detail

There are some residents who fondly remember the Littleham youth group from many years ago as a place where they could develop positive relationships outside of the home and school. There was a strong sense that that opportunity for youngsters today is missing locally.

C – What is needed – in detail

Many of these comments came from one family in particular, who we believe had some involvement with the council funded youth group that ran for a while out of Clayton House and stopped during the Covid lockdown. This family had obviously given the issue a great deal of thought and attended the event purposefully. They gave an extended and very helpful interview.

The following points in particular were also corroborated by the reflections of others:-

Outreach in the first instance

Reaching the young people who are potentially causing problems on the estate was felt to be paramount but also difficult. It was felt unlikely that they'd respond instantly to an invitation to join a traditional 'club' and that some proactive outreach, either by visiting known trouble hotspots, such as the Play Park, or by going into the school and college would be necessary.

Interestingly, the Littlehamsters also learned at the Event, in conversation with Nick White, the newly appointed church Youth Leader that this is his plan. And, on a visit to Space to meet with Mark Gerry and Steve Brind we also learned that the Space team were recently commissioned by the police to conduct some outreach work in Exmouth town. This will be returned to below.

Funding and professional supervision

Families and the Littlehamsters have reflected that any 'club' or regular provision, local to Littleham, needs to be properly and consistently funded with professional supervision.

Other points included:-

Enhancing the childhood experience

An alternative to the influence of mobile phones/social media

Exercise/physical health

Days out to places of interest

Domestic/life skills

Provision for autism/other special needs

Activities with purpose

Provision for young people with autism and support for their carers is something we have also heard referenced by estate families in other contexts and could well be important.

Data analysis – conclusions and recommendations

Outreach

The Littlehamsters themselves and those interviewed all described an environment of periodic stress and fear that is restricting physical activity out of doors and negatively impacting mental health and wellbeing. It may be helpful for providers/stakeholders, tempted to dismiss the examples given as not that severe, to imagine them happening to their children and property, on their own street.

Usefully though, it appears that there are three particular manifestations of anti-social behaviour by young people on the Littleham estates that are creating this. That is the abuse at The Crescent Play Park, the spate of car vandalism and the apparent increase in County Lines drug dealing. So this gives us a very clear indication of where to start any outreach work. All of these things are visible on the street and these are the young people that we need to address.

Given that the Youth Worker for the church intends to conduct outreach in the first instance and that workers at Space have some recent experience of conducting outreach in town, and Cllr David Poor has expressed an interest in resurrecting youth provision on the Littleham estate, **it would seem very logical to arrange an inter-agency meeting to at least share insights and plans. The Littlehamsters would like to be a part of this.**

Youth 'group' provision in Littleham

There was general agreement in principle that this would be a good thing but not necessarily in the first instance. When we've learned from the outreach, there are several things that should be built into any resultant youth group provision:-

- Consistent funding/professional supervision
- Activities with purpose
- Activities that take youngsters beyond Littleham
- Activities that provide domestic/life skills

With special provision for youngsters with autism and their carers. It was noted that there is weekly provision for adults with autism locally and that this is needed for children/young people and their carers too. Again, this might be an inter-agency opportunity.

Event evaluation against outcomes

Outcome One – What we wanted to happen

To create a relaxed and comfortable, community-led space where residents would feel safe and able to give in-depth interviews providing rich qualitative data.

What actually happened

In fact, this was highly successful. The combined effect of having a resident-led, designed and hosted event, the careful choice of venue, plus the efforts that the Littlehamsters made to decorate the space and provide playful activities for the children made it possible for the adults to relax and engage in extended and deep interviews with their neighbours. This produced rich qualitative data for analysis presented here. Around 35-40 individuals attended and three families participated in the interviews. The Littlehamsters were ready to manage more interviews and it would have been better to see more families but they reflected in debrief that they believe that, as residents come to recognise this as a mechanism by which they can have their say, they will attract more in the future.



Outcome Two – What we wanted to happen

To ensure that the families who did attend were locally resident

What actually happened

Again, this outcome was demonstrably achieved. The Littlehamsters were particularly keen that the event would reach deeply into the estate and that the voice of residents would not be diluted by those who don't experience the same social and environmental factors. By focusing on handling the invitations themselves, specifically to their neighbours, the Littlehamsters were able to achieve this admirably.

Outcome Three – What we wanted to happen

To have local stakeholders in the room

What actually happened

Members of the Exmouth Coastal Churches and wardens of the Littleham Leisure Centre itself were well represented in the room and the Littlehamsters were particularly pleased to meet and talk with Nick White, the newly recruited church Youth Worker and his wife Claire. They were also glad to welcome David Bassett from "WEB" and Cllrs Anne Hall, Nick Hookway and Mark Williamson, plus Jamie Claydon, Community Development worker from East Devon District Council and Tamsin Phelvin from Public Health, Devon County Council. No one from Space was able to attend but the Littlehamsters had met with them the previous week to take their view and likewise the Primary School hosted a Littlehamsters planning meeting and donated a bag of children's books to be given away at the event. One Littlehamster remarked that "it was good meeting so many lovely people who care for the folks of Littleham". The College and Local Neighbourhood Police Team didn't respond to the invitation.



Outcome Four – What we wanted to happen

To set a precedent and formula for this kind of relaxed, family-friendly, community-led liaison event – an Easy Speak Event

What actually happened

The Littlehamsters felt proud of what they had achieved and are animated to repeat the exercise on the *Our Youth* theme or moving onto the next theme of *Our Carers*. They believe that they, as a group, and this resident-led Easy Speak event format can provide an invaluable data resource for providers into the future.

