

consult

policy not politics



Consult Policy Campaign Day Tynemouth November 24th 2007

About Consult

Consult advocates the role of younger people in policy development in recognising that increasing sections of the electorate need to be engaged in new and relevant ways. We believe that policy can be a bridge between politics and sections of the community who have become disillusioned with the democratic process.

About the Policy Campaign Days

The Policy Campaign Days are about Consult best supporting our party in the run up to the next general election.

Consult is offering to facilitate policy discussions across marginal constituencies which can be used to invite first time voters to debate current issues. In addition to supporting the campaigns of prospective parliamentary candidates, this is a unique way of highlighting key issues to younger people who may not normally attend a political event and encouraging them to engage with the local campaign.

www.Consult-Interactive.com

Consult Policy Campaign Day, Tynemouth, November 24th 2007

About this Event

The first Policy Campaign Day took place in Tynemouth on Saturday 24th November. In the morning Consult members supported the campaign of PPC Wendy Morton in assisting her with a conservation exercise in cleaning up the local environment. Delegates then adjourned to a local pub to debate whether alcohol or drugs should take the priority in addressing the causes of youth crime.

Debate Findings – Alcohol or Drugs: Which one should take priority in Addressing Youth Crime?

The following is a summary of the main findings that arose during this debate.

Acquiring a Long Term Approach

The first issue to arise in discussing this topic was that a long term approach needs to be taken to both addressing youth crime and the problems caused by alcohol and drug abuse. Too often politicians appear to be making knee jerk decisions to these problems without looking at their cause and source. Greater police resourcing, prison places and funding are frequently the currency used to describe the problems of crime and its solutions but do they address the causes of crime and offer long term solutions?

Extended licensing for instance, is at least long term in its approach to try and change the drinking culture of Britain. This was felt to be right because tackling crime has to involve challenging and changing people's behaviour for the better.

Drugs: Its place in the Chain of Crime

In tackling the question of the debate, it was felt that drugs has enjoyed a far higher profile than alcohol in terms of being linked to crime. Much has been done to increase public awareness of the dangers associated with drug abuse and progress has been made on tackling drug addiction through rehabilitation and other treatments.

Drugs, and in particular drug supply and dealing, tend to become associated with groups of younger people that can often be the catalyst for youth crime. Muggings, thefts and assaults can often be driven by a desire for money and the ability to produce/supply more drugs.

Hence the link between addiction, debt, educational failure and family breakdown that has been explained by the Centre for Social Justice. The connection between being trapped in the poorest and most deprived areas of Britain and having to commit crime to supply more drugs (causing ever greater spiralling crime) is an obvious problem and needs addressing.

Alcohol: The Invisible Drug of Modern Day Britain

Alcohol was not felt to have the same prominence or as drugs in terms of tackling youth crime. However, this arguably makes it a bigger potential problem with many people often drinking excessively without it being condemned. In many inner cities, drinking is a way of networking professionally as well as socialising that is virtually defined as 'normal' behaviour.

Two key issues arose from this point in the debate; the first is that many younger people drink alarmingly high amounts of alcohol. Since the policy debate, a recent survey by the Evening Standard found 3 younger people, chosen randomly, who were easily consuming between 20-30 units per week. This is dangerously high, with recent medical research showing links between high alcohol consumption and cancer.

The second is that alcohol has very much become the invisible drug of modern day Britain. Recent television news footage has shown how alcohol not only fuels crime and anti-social behaviour but also causes disorderly behaviour from underage people. Worryingly, therefore, alcohol is not only seen as an increasing stimulant of crime, it is also seen as socially acceptable and part of 'normal life' by many younger people in reaching adulthood.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the judgement on whether drugs or alcohol should take priority in addressing youth crime depends on how and where one perceives the root of the problem to lie. There is no doubt that much has been done to highlight the problems caused by drug abuse with much progress being made in encouraging rehabilitation and addressing addiction. However, the link between drugs and crime is still very evident, particularly in our poorest areas, where debt and addiction combine with social breakdown to provide a chain of behaviour that needs tackling.

Alcohol, whilst not having the prominence given to it that drugs has in terms of causing youth crime, undoubtedly does fuel anti-social behaviour and crime as well as disorderly behaviour within city centres. Most alarmingly, the consumption of alcohol is extremely high amongst many younger people, particularly in professions where regular drinking is associated with socialising.

So whilst alcohol is not given the same level of attention as drugs when it comes to tackling crime, perhaps it carries greater risk by society not being sufficiently aware of its dangers and also its status as an acceptable recreational pastime.