

“An Independent Assessment of the ‘Prevention First’ Crime Prevention Strategy in Ayrshire”.

Research Report commissioned by Police Scotland and the Ayrshire Councils
Executive Summary



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Introduction

The aim of this study was to conduct, an assessment of the Police Scotland, 'Prevention First', Crime Prevention Strategy in Ayrshire. 'Prevention First' was first introduced in North Ayrshire in February 2014 and rolled out across East and South Ayrshire following that. The approach as implemented in North, East and South Ayrshire had been informed by the experience of the New Zealand Police Force. Understanding the complex concerns and needs of all who work and live in Scottish communities is key for Police Scotland in keeping people safe and therefore their approach focuses on prevention and, as necessary, enforcement: a proactive, flexible, problem-solving approach to local community issues to.

"...prevent crime, reduce victimisation and reduce locations where offending takes place, through a partnership early intervention approach which gets to the heart of issues and identifies the best way to solve problems and tackle community concerns".

The programme encapsulates a partnership approach to tackling violence, anti-social behaviour and community concerns regarding violent crime. The main ethos of the programme is that violence is preventable, not inevitable and that crime, violence and anti-social behaviour are driven by underlying social conditions and span the household, community and school environments, entailing a multi-agency approach to address them. Key stakeholders include a wide range of 'Community Planning' partners including Police Scotland, Scottish Fire & Rescue, North Ayrshire Council, East Ayrshire Council, South Ayrshire Council and others organisations from the Third Sector.

We report a summary of the main findings from the evaluation here which indicates that 'Prevention First' is delivering better outcomes for individuals and communities whilst simultaneously significantly reducing demand on police and partner resources through the early implementation of more effective, joined up, solutions. One of the major strengths of the 'Prevention First' programme and methodology is that it is a genuinely transformative policing methodology. The main difference identified by the respondents was that of improved partnership working and excellent information sharing, which led to a rapid response and to dealing with issues more quickly. We explored, taking cognisance of austerity measures and financial pressures, the effective, efficient and viability of this partnership policing operational strategy / methodology.

Methodology

We adopted a mixed methodology which is a common approach in applied ‘real world’ social research (Robson, 2011).

Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of this research project was to provide an independent review and evaluation of the pan Ayrshire ‘Prevention First’ crime reduction strategy.¹

The objectives of this review were to:-

- Review the available documentary evidence of the operationalisation of the programme.
- Conduct an independent academic review of both qualitative and quantitative evidence to assess the effectiveness and efficiency and of the programme.
- Produce an evaluation report and an executive summary of the findings of the report.
- Report periodically to the ‘Prevention First’ programme board.
- Develop a monitoring tool to explore the possibility of evaluating the programme longitudinally.

We undertook a quantitative analysis of the available statistics and qualitatively undertook focus groups and interviews with key organisational individuals. The research was undertaken in 4 pragmatic stages:-

Stage 1: We conducted a brief literature review to identify what the literature says about what works for Community/Partnership Policing.

Stage 2: We identified who the current key stakeholders were for the Ayrshire pilot.

Stage 3: We conducted interviews/focus groups with key individuals and conducted a quantitative evaluation of crime statistics provided by Police Scotland and an analysis of Police Scotland’s PF Facebook data.

Stage 4: We worked with ‘Prevention First’ Programme Board and Police Scotland in the development of a monitoring tool and explored the possibility of evaluating the programme longitudinally.

¹ Some of the original objectives relating to reporting timescales were relaxed by Police Scotland and the programme board because of issues relating to the serious illness of two of the research team.

Prevention First - An Overview

Prevention First was originally conceived and implemented in New Zealand.² The Operating Model originated in Auckland, as a different model for policing to engage with communities. In 2011 it became the national operational model. It is described by the Police Commissioner Peter Marshall as “... *the new operating strategy for New Zealand Police*” which “...*puts prevention at the forefront of everything we do.*”

Its purpose is to reduce crime and to make New Zealand a safer place to live, visit and to do business. It is a balanced approach that uses intelligence, enforcement and alternative ways of resolving cases to better understand and respond to them. Change and flexibility are embedded in the strategy, which was designed as a framework for understanding and responding proactively to issues at the root of crime; to avoid reactionism; stasis; and to solve individual cases. Marshall announced that ‘*Prevention First*’ marks the beginning of an exciting new era for New Zealand Police. We know it will take some time to change our traditional thinking and the style of policing we have become accustomed to, but we are committed to making it happen. I hope you will support us on this journey”. From this impassioned appeal, it is apparent that such an approach requires the police and their partners including communities to buy into.

The key aims were to develop innovative and sustainable, practical solutions using problem-solving approaches to manage Crime Hotspots and Priority Locations. A tool kit approach was adopted to develop specific enabling actions to:-

- Deploy to beat demand;
- Understand and respond to the drivers of crime; and
- Foster a change in policing ‘mindsets’ that puts prevention and the needs of victims at the forefront of policing.

Deployment is a crucial component of the strategy. This entails being prepared and flexible to mobilise resources pre-emptively, and proactively, to stay-on-top of demand. ‘Prevention First’ provides a structured and disciplined framework for doing so and utilises resources in an informed and well-directed manner to achieve and maintain demand reductions:-

- Critical Command Information.

² ‘PREVENTION FIRST’: NATIONAL OPERATING STRATEGY 2011 2015.

- Tasking and Coordination,
- Workforce Management; and
- Operational Delivery (Execution).

The Development of Crime Prevention in Scotland.

The landscape of Scottish Policing, and particularly Crime Reduction/Prevention since the inception of Police Scotland, has changed considerably over the past three decades and has become, as previously identified by Donnelly and Scott (2005) more localised whilst maintain its focus on Crime Reduction which has a long history in Scotland, and has been in existence since the 1960s (See Monaghan, 1997; and Henry, 2009; Rogers, 2003; Myhill, 2006). Crime Reduction Units have now been rationalised to provide a local service and draw on a wide variety of Policing specialisms.

Police Scotland: Organisational change via the ‘Prevention First’ programme

Chief-Superintendent Gillian MacDonald³ was influenced to implement a preventative strategy by 1) the dialogue arising from the Christie Commission; and 2) the significant and long-standing issues around serious violence and in particular in North Ayrshire where 22% of the divisions violence crime occurred. This was a long-standing problem. It was obvious that a change of strategy and tactics was required. A partnership approach was identified as the best option to support change and improve outcomes for the whole community: both victims and offenders. In her research she came across the ‘Prevention First’ approach in New Zealand. This confirmed that it was essential to adopt a ‘whole policing approach’ based around prevention.⁴ Following engagement with partners North Ayrshire was chosen for the pilot to see if the strategy could provide better solutions to the ingrained culture of violence in that area.

³ Chief Superintendent Gillian MacDonald is currently ACC MacDonald with a responsibility for Community Policing.

⁴ This whole systems approach was something that the former Strathclyde and other forces were moving towards prior to the formation of the single force. However what ‘Prevention First’ seems to have done is pull the various strands from enhanced policing, stop-and-search, Community Services Glasgow and the One Glasgow approach which also ran in Dumfries and Galloway together. Although the ISDM model was well intentioned and more suited to larger urban conurbations the model unintentionally undermined much of the good Community Policing Policies that had been in place. This explains the background of the need to look beyond a solution to a problem and to identify a new way of policing/working.

The results of the pilot scheme were impressive and partnership working produced some surprising results. The combined approach of reducing anti-social behaviour and nullifying the cost of evictions proved an effective and efficient use of shared resources. It stopped the previous culture of tenants playing the police and housing off against each other. It is more effective than issuing a fixed penalty, or confiscating music devices. With the success of the pilot all three local authorities were keen to support the evaluation because the Chief Executives were quite keen to take it to COSLA and SOLIS as an example of excellent partnership working, combining early intervention and prevention. Plans were made to roll out the pilot to the East and South Ayrshire.

Implementing the strategy - Chief Superintendent MacDonald vision is detailed below⁵:-

What is 'Prevention First'?

- It is a partnership approach to local service delivery.
- It underpins the policing approach in Ayrshire.
- It initially focussed on the most challenging local wards.
- It prevents and reduces crime and offending.
- It reduces anti-social behaviour and victimisation, resulting in fewer victims.
- It reduces locations (hotspots) where offending takes place.
- It aims to stay on top of localised criminal environments.
- Its goal is to achieve better outcomes for individuals and communities.

Why 'Prevention First'?

- There was an obvious need to do something different.
- The levels of violence were of concern to police and community.
- Recommendations from the Christie report around prevention hadn't resulted in the shift required.
- The drive for better partnerships, collaboration and effective delivery.

How was it achieved?

- Via intense daily scrutiny of incidents, crime reports and patterns of concern.
- This enabled partners to identify areas of common concern including victims, offenders, repeat callers, problematic locations and emerging crime trends.
- Information sharing and timely referral to partners.
- An on-going dialogue and agreed actions.

⁵ As unveiled at the SIPR Annual Conference in 2016.

- Daily communication with partners, backed up by weekly/fortnightly meetings to discuss progress.

Why a partnership approach?

- It engenders powerful shared goals.
- Enhanced communication and a continuing dialogue.
- It facilitates early intervention e.g. joint warnings and individual tailored approaches.
- It targets issues impacting on communities in real time.
- It enables collective management and problem solving to be applied to complex, multi-faceted issues which could not be solved by a single agency alone.

How is 'Prevention First' measured?

- Performance – fewer crimes, incidents and victims.
- Demand reduction.
- Efficiency savings – using Home Officer Guide for the Economic Cost of Crime Toolkit.

Taking Prevention First into the Future!

- The Public Sector transformation conversation is on-going.
- This will lead to less money and less resources.
- There is a need for smarter ways of working.
- The pressure to work more collaboratively with partners and communities.
- The above provide better opportunities for outcomes and for re-thinking/re modelling work practices, using a collective approach.
- The need for commissioning independent evaluation of what works and what does not.
- The need to adopt evidence based approaches to service re-design.

Best Practices Identified.

To reiterate, from the evaluation we have identified the following best practices:-

- 'Prevention First' is, in itself, an example of best practice.
- Its form and structure - weekly or fortnightly meetings
- The 'Prevention First' referral form is specific and process related.
- The leading and supporting roles played by all 3 councils, are also worthy of mention: the administrative and management role of the council, both played a significant role in 'Prevention First' pan Ayrshire.
- The ASBIT risk management forms are apposite and appropriate.

- The North Ayrshire PPT is also singled out for praise: in North Ayrshire, this proactive team provide the ‘teeth’ of ‘Prevention First’.
- In South Ayrshire, the value of elements of the MATAC system is recognised.
- The multi-agency work conducted with the Fire and Rescue Service; in relation to fire-raising and fire safety are also commendable.
- The pan Ayrshire example of the ‘Prevention First’ referral, in relation to cable theft, is recognised as being of national significance.

Recommendations:

Further work is required to develop a new matrix for cost savings, or projected cost savings, by incorporating data from the council, NHS and the Third Sector.

- Consideration should be given to developing ‘Briefing Sheets’ or “Practice Notes” on best practice: for dissemination to partners
- We suggest that consideration be given to selected council anti-social behaviour officers and housing officers attending a Crime Reduction course at Tulliallan to foster closer partnership; working and enhance Councils’ awareness of prevention strategies.
- Selected police ‘Prevention First’ officers would benefit from attending CLD training courses or qualifications.
- There is a pressing need to be able to identify and differentiate ‘Prevention First’ cases from other Police Scotland statistical data. It is imperative that a ‘Prevention First’ marker be added to the system to facilitate enhanced statistical evaluation of the effectiveness of the ‘Prevention First’.
- There is considerable scope to develop ‘Prevention First’ into the Third Sector, to increase its scope., through encouraging and developing new partnerships. This would be beneficial in terms of securing grants, to allow the recruitment of new staff and resources to progress particular projects. Whilst these funding streams are often short-term, they can be used to pilot new ways of inter-agency working. For example, see Fife Council ‘Prevention First’ Homelessness Strategy.
- ‘Prevention First’ was used to highlight a volume of concern for Person type calls which led to a swift and joined up partnership response being implemented which provided appropriate support to a vulnerable individual within the community, hugely reducing, in fact eliminating, the draw on police and partner agencies thereafter.

- ‘Prevention First’ thrives on local knowledge, and we argue that there is a role for recruiting or allocating members of the Special Constabulary to work exclusively in ‘Prevention First’ areas, to take up the slack left by the loss of the Warden Service.
- There is a need to consider the relationship between ‘Prevention First’ and Crime Reduction Departments and how best to reconfigure this in the new model.
- There is a need to acknowledge the role of key players in the ‘Prevention First’ success story in Ayrshire: enthusiasm, commitment and dedication made ‘Prevention First’ a success.

Conclusion

In conclusion we found ‘Prevention First’ is an innovative methodology, which is fit for purpose and has the potential to make significant efficiency and effectiveness savings. We argue that ‘Prevention First’ has the potential to be instigated elsewhere in Scotland/UK, and that, if it were implemented with the same spirit and passion as in Ayrshire it could lead to significant transformations in policing. However, it will not work without genuine buy-in from the local authority and other significant partners.

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