

DEVELOPING THE ROLE OF THE POLICE EARLY INTERVENTION OFFICER

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Summary: This briefing paper discusses the new and innovative role of the police “*Early Intervention Officer*” or ‘Early Intervention Worker’. This specialist role is the latest in the portfolio of police staff specialisms in Scotland. In this paper the author examines whether the new role has potential to add value to the policing process and also discusses ways in which the role could be developed further. The paper discusses how the new role fits into the community policing portfolio alongside other specialisms, many of which are under threat in the current economic climate.

INTRODUCTION

Although the concept of the ‘Early Intervention Officer’ is enshrined in ACPOS policy in relation to juvenile crime (ACPOS, 2010), in the current economic climate no role is sacrosanct. The role of the Police Early Intervention Officer has its roots in theories relating to “*juvenile*” and “*persistent*” offenders, both of which are problematic concepts in policing terms. As stereotypes they have been remarkably persistent over the past 40 years, both from an academic and practitioner standpoint. In the rhetoric which has developed it is generally accepted that the former will become the latter in due course unless some form of early intervention strategy is initiated. Academic opinion as to the veracity of the argument is divided, but from a practitioner viewpoint it has long been acknowledged, albeit anecdotally, that the police, criminal justice, welfare, health and education systems work with a core group of persistent offenders and criminal families, generation after generation. As a result, multi-agency and partnership working is becoming the norm when dealing with such offenders. Consequentially, there is tremendous scope for rationalising the effort expended across the public services in Scotland.

The purpose of this briefing paper is to set the context of early intervention into the literature and lexicon of operational policing because, to date, there are few academic studies of the subject - the study by Farrington and Welsh (2007) on “*Saving Children from a Life of Crime*” being the exception. However, the concept of early intervention *per se* has a substantial literature in the health services and in mental health. In particular, psychosis and psychotic behaviour are issues of concern. Nevertheless, the concept of involving police officers in mental health intervention has been around since the 1960s (Bard, 1969). Research into early intervention programmes [EIP] in relation to mental health issues is on the increase – for example see the research of Garety *et al.* (2006) who discuss terms and issues such as symptoms, treatment adherence, social and vocational functioning, satisfaction and quality of life, relapse and re-hospitalisation. Nevertheless, Garety *et al.* (2006) conclude that the provision of specialised care for early psychosis sufferers can achieve better outcomes and that the study therefore provides support for maintaining the current policy. This work in relation to mental health has been extended into alcohol and drug treatment programmes and thus into community policing via work into young offenders and persistent offender programmes (Hagell and Newburn, 1994; Benda and Tollett, 1999; Garside, 2004).

There is also a burgeoning literature in relation to criminal families. For example see Osborn and West, 1978; Farrington, 1990; Rowe and Farrington, 1997; Farrington *et al.*, 2001. According to Farrington (1990), the top predictors of offending up to age 32 are: socio-economic deprivation; poor parenting; family deviance; school problems; hyperactivity-impulsivity-attention deficit; and antisocial child behaviour. Farrington *et al.* (2001) reported that persistent offenders were highly concentrated in criminal families and that if one relative had been arrested, there was a high likelihood that another relative had also been arrested. There is a strong correlation between criminal fathers and criminal sons. Early intervention work offers an opportunity to break that cycle.

THE CONCEPT OF EARLY INTERVENTION IN POLICING EXPLAINED

In policing circles the concept of *Early Intervention Programmes* has largely become associated with the subject of police complaints systems through the work of policing scholars such as Walker, Alpert, and Kenney (2001); Walker (2003); Walker (2007); and Lersch, Bazley and Mieczkowski (2006) because of the development of early intervention systems for dealing with complaints. Consequentially, there is a danger that the concept could be viewed negatively by operational officers. However, the use of EIP in police complaints circles provides evidence of the utility of the problem solving approach in policing terms.

For a fuller explanation of how EIPs can be implemented in policing, the NPIA documents entitled "*Local Policing Guide for early intervention and prevention of youth crime and anti-social behaviour: Managers / Practitioners*"; and the 2010 ACPOS Youth Strategy Document provide useful accounts. The former document is a seminal guide to EI work in a policing context and is part of a national policy (for England and Wales) on "*youth focused policing*". Selected aspects of the EI process are presented below in abridged format. The purpose of EI work is to:-

- Improve the safety of children, young people and the community by early identification of risk via the provision of a proportionate and effective intervention to reduce that risk.
- Improve partnership working by working more effectively with other agencies to improve the response to children and young people, while reducing cost through improved working practices.
- Reduce crime and disorder (and its perception) by involving young people through an intelligence-led, problem-solving approach to provide early identification of the problem whilst initiating an effective intervention. This response should be proportionate to the threat, making full and appropriate use of available police and partnership powers.
- Improve the satisfaction and confidence of children and young people with the Police Service by enhancing the quality of contact; working alongside young people; and understanding how policing interventions can impact upon their future opportunities.

This approach is predicated around four general principles, namely:-

- *Negotiating Access* – providing access to policing or community safety services through a named point of contact
- *Influence* – Ensuring influence over community safety priorities in an area
- *Intervention* – Encouraging joint action with communities / partners to solve shared problems
- *Answers* – Providing sustainable solutions to problems and feedback on results, if not the answers to the problems

The idea behind EI work is to ensure that young people remain healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and achieve economic well-being. This is done through partnership working, information sharing, youth engagement and participation. From a policing perspective, EI work is organized around the now ubiquitous problem-solving SARA scanning model because the model suits the ethos and ideology of what early intervention work seeks to solve. From the combined experience of EI teams in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, there are a series of identified risk factors which start with the individual and their embedded family situation before impacting upon the school and the community.

Table 1 provides a list of these escalating factors. However, this list is not exhaustive and is only illustrative, highlighting a need for a comprehensive list of indicators to be mapped and developed across agencies to avoid duplication of service provision.

SERVICE PROVISION

One of the approaches adopted is the provision of youth services which enable local interventions to be carried out on time and effectively. These graded levels of intervention are classified as universal; targeted, specialist and priority.

- *Universal* – These activities / interventions are available to all, such as sports club, community centre, or a program run by a charity or a social enterprise
- *Targeted* – Where the young person at risk is referred into the activity with the expectation that their progress and engagement will be monitored and supervised to achieve a particular outcome
- *Specialist* – Where the young person at risk receives intensive supervision, monitoring or support
- *Priority* – Where there is urgency in tackling an imminent perceived crisis

Table 1 - Identified Risk Factors			
Personal	Family	School	Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hyperactivity / ○ Impulsivity / ADD / ADHD / Aspergers syndrome / Dyslexia etc. ○ Low intelligence and cognitive impairment ○ Alienation and lack of social commitment ○ Acceptance of offending and drug misuse ○ Regular exposure to heavy drinking ○ Low levels of personal social capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Poor parenting skills, including poor supervision and discipline ○ Familial conflict ○ History of criminal activity and exposure to criminal social capital ○ Parental attitudes that condone anti-social and/or criminal behaviour ○ Low income ○ Unemployment ○ Domestic violence in the home ○ Absence of father and/or positive male role models ○ Parental substance misuse or mental ill health ○ Sibling rivalry ○ Poor housing ○ Being a victim of crime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Aggressive behaviour (including bullying) ○ Lack of commitment (including truancy) ○ Poor teachers ○ Lack of resources ○ Lack of discipline ○ School disorganisation and lack of policies ○ Built physical environment of the school. ○ Graffiti / Litter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Criminal culture ○ Disorganised neighbourhood ○ Neglected neighbourhood ○ Availability of drugs ○ High turnover of population and lack of neighbourhood pride / values / attachment ○ Community tolerance to crime / anti social behaviour ○ Built environment ○ Graffiti / Litter ○ Presence of a police station ○ Frequency of police patrols. ○ CCTV presence

(Source: Adapted from material sourced in *Local Policing Guide for early intervention and prevention of youth crime and anti-social behaviour: Managers and from numerous advice leaflets located on the internet*);

It is apparent that the skills required are not necessarily policing skills, but in many cases social and community work skills. This is significant because sworn police officers may not be the obvious choice of personnel to recruit as Early Intervention Officers. The role of the EIO is to work with Youth Justice Management Units, the Children's Reporter, Council Social Work Departments and agencies such as SACRO (Safeguarding Communities Reducing Offending), Barnardos, APEX Scotland and Turning Point Scotland to target and help young offenders before they become tomorrow's repeat offenders and serial criminals. Whatever the agency, the intention is for the EIO to identify, intervene and engage with young people embarking upon antisocial behaviour to reduce the likelihood of them developing such behaviour, or engaging in offending and ultimately of becoming actively involved in more serious crime. The objective is to break the cycle of the criminal family perpetuating crime. The basic remit of the EIO is a proactive one with mixed responsibilities:-

- To implement and manage the allocation of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABC's)
- To promote the value of the ABC scheme including the benefits of multi-agency working, early intervention, diversion, prevention and joint problem solving
- To represent the Antisocial Behaviour Unit at meetings relating to young people linked to the ABC scheme
- To implement and manage the allocation of Early Intervention Warning Letters
- To identify and target areas of reported youth annoyance, of vulnerable young people and high youth crime
- To support ongoing youth diversionary projects implemented by the Police

Early Intervention Officers and teams generally work with Youth Offending Team (YOTs). Early intervention teams (EIT) are usually part of a youth offending team who operate in a multi agency network. EIO's and EIT's are responsible for delivering youth inclusion and providing support services. The evolving ethos is to work with children and young people aged between eight and 16 who exhibit antisocial and disruptive behaviour and as a result may be at significant risk of offending; being excluded from school; or may have already committed a crime. Many such individuals may not yet have been charged with a crime. The young persons may be referred by any agency including the police, antisocial behaviour unit, environment and housing services, social care, health and education as well as voluntary organisations. Provision is usually made for self-referrals. The intention is to build better futures for the 'at risk' young persons. Grampian Police is the latest force to recruit EIOs to work in conjunction with the Young Offenders Review Group (YORG) to offer early interventions to young offenders, thus providing them with an opportunity to divert their activities away from crime. The EIO ethos is to work in partnership with the third sector to develop and promote a range of effective early interventions and where appropriate diversion schemes designed to reduce the number of persistent young offenders, such as Street Football and Street Basketball. This appears to compliment the activities of existing community policing initiatives and schemes.

A trigger point appears to be the onset of the teenage years and a move from primary to secondary school. The physical changes occurring within the young person can cause issues which in turn influence the choices they have to make and the situations they are exposed to. Confidence issues and an inability to cope with pressure and possibly even bullying may cause them to play truancy and "go off the rails". In most schools there is provision for extra learning support but many at risk children slip through the net. Presenting oneself to others, communicating and developing relationships with others can be problematic for 'at risk' youth.

An Early Intervention doctrine has evolved which has several elements including:-

- Involving Parents (or Carer) to gain their commitment and support
- Gaining cooperation of the child at risk
- Working with families in their own environment
- Initiating a system of referrals, youth inclusion, and support panels

EIT members meet with young people at risk at home or other mutually agreed safe venue to provide advice about voluntary support programmes and other specialist organizations that can provide the help required. In the interview the EIO will seek to establish if the Young Person:

- Does not listen to the parents or challenges authority
- Has been truanting from school
- Is involved with a "bad crowd" or is easily influenced by others
- Has been the victim of bullying
- Is involved in bullying
- Has been excluded or threatened with exclusion
- Is complained about by other people
- Is smoking, drinking or abusing substances
- Has come to police attention before
- Has any other child in the household come to police attention before
- Is able to refuse to divulge their whereabouts to parents

The services provided include those listed in Table 2 below.

There is the potential for the EIO to work synergistically with Antisocial Behaviour Units or officers, Crime Reduction Officers; School Liaison Officers and Community Beat Officers to augment and enhance the provision of joined up services to the communities. This argument will be developed in the next section of the paper.

Table 2 – EI Service	
At school	Home-school liaison to support school attendance and enhance links between home and school; One to one sessions for children at risk of exclusion; Complaints leaflet for children and young people.
Transition	Group programmes for children to enable them to manage transition to secondary school; School-based groups for young people to provide continued support during transition; Group for parents of children.
In the community	Befriending children and young people; Keeping safe – strategies for children during junior citizenship weeks; Signposting to specialist services offering support and advice in the community and programmes about managing anger and disruptive behaviour for young people; Constructive leisure providing help with seeking out and providing information about activities outside school, youth clubs, etc; Mentoring programmes for parents and young people; Home visiting to ensure a thorough and ongoing assessment and opportunity for every family member to contribute.
Parenting support and intervention	Support for parents and carers; Mediation to help strengthen family relationships; Development of a plan of action including family and extended family networks; Strengthening families, strengthening communities – group programmes.

(Source: Adapted from material sourced in *Local Policing Guide for early intervention and prevention of youth crime and anti-social behaviour: Managers and from numerous advice leaflets located on the internet*);

EXPANDING AND DEVELOPING THE EARLY INTERVENTION MODEL

Although the typical Early Intervention Officer is currently a police staff member there is also scope for expanding and developing the role of the job further. The Early Intervention Officer operating at the level described above is a welcome addition for those forces able to finance them. However, the role has the potential to be more than an adjunct to existing roles because targeted Early Intervention work has the potential to sit alongside and complement existing Community Policing structures. In future a unit of police officers trained in the Early Intervention ethos could combine all the best aspects of the Crime Reduction Officer, the School Liaison Officer, and the Community Beat Officer by rationalizing and prioritizing the ‘red thread’ which connects all the roles together. Table 3 sets out the ethos of the various ‘community policing’ threads available to police commanders.

However, in this ‘Age of Austerity’, with the consequent threat of cuts to public service, many police forces are already under severe pressure to make financial and efficiency savings. This has already resulted in some shedding of jobs and roles as yesterday’s specialisms such as the Anti Social Behaviour Officer, the Crime Reduction Officer, the School Liaison Officer and even the Community Beat Officer may be subject to a programme of civilianization. In this context many hard pressed divisional commanders have to make painful decisions and look for value for money or new ways of doing tried and tested policing. In an ideal world a policing division would have all of these resources available and they would be line managed via the same Command team, albeit this aspect of cohesion rarely happens. Academic studies of the cohesion of community policing measures are rare.

Increasingly, difficult decisions will have to be made as how to resource such diverse and varied community units. Natural wastage will see a reduction in numbers and as serving officers are diverted back to frontline policing duties it is predicted that the size of community support units will shrink. However, the process has already begun and many Area Inspectors and Divisional Commanders are being asked to make decisions and cuts and if they wish to retain community policing units they have to finance them within shrinking budgets. In some cases community policing units have been disbanded.

Table 3 – The ethos of the community policing apparatus

Resource / Cost	Ethos and description
Dedicated Neighbourhood Teams (NT's). <i>A high cost strategy.</i>	The ethos is to address all community issues and reduce / prevent crime whilst broadcasting a high visibility presence. This is the ideal model in a fiscally stable world where an area has a dedicated team of CBOs on call for most of the day to take care of community policing issues. No likelihood of civilianization of core policing roles.
Dedicated Community Beat Officers. <i>A medium cost strategy.</i>	The ethos remains the same but the cost is much reduced by ring fencing selected officers. No likelihood of civilianization of core policing roles.
Combined CBO / response Teams. <i>A medium cost strategy.</i>	The ethos is similar but diluted by a reduction in time and effort in terms of community policing time. It is an attractive option in an age of austerity. No likelihood of civilianization of core policing roles.
Dedicated Community Special Constables. <i>A low cost strategy.</i>	The ethos is of high visibility and to reduce / prevent crime. This model is to recruit local people into the ranks of Specials and utilize them as a community resource. It is an attractive proposition but may be ineffective.
PCSO's / Wardens. <i>A medium cost strategy.</i>	The ethos is one of high visibility and public accountability. It is effective but limited. Civilianized.
School Liaison Officers. <i>A high cost strategy.</i>	The ethos is of preventing crime through education. To reduce / prevent crime. Very time intensive and difficult to measure. Operates on self-belief and faith. Could be civilianized.
Crime Reduction Officers. <i>A high cost strategy.</i>	To reduce / prevent crime and provide services to the business community. Trend towards civilianization.
Anti Social Behaviour Officers. <i>A high cost strategy.</i>	To reduce and prevent crime / anti-social behaviour. Trend towards civilianization.
CCTV Officers. <i>A high cost strategy.</i>	To assist in the collection and dissemination of low level community intelligence. These mainly civilian employees assist all other community units.
Early Intervention Officers. <i>A medium cost strategy.</i>	To reduce / prevent crime. Trend to recruit civilians.

(Source: Author generated).

Areas of potential cuts are to units which may be regarded as being non-essential policing units. Obviously this strays into the subjective area of opinion. Two such areas identified are 1) School Liaison officers; and 2) Crime Reduction officers who may be viewed as being expendable because many argue that it is difficult to measure their effectiveness. It is appreciated that different forces have different nomenclatures for their specialisms and may operate under a different model. Moreover, in many Scottish forces the Campus Officer model precludes delivering lesson notes in schools. There have been positive evaluations carried out on Campus cops, both locally (East Renfrewshire) and nationally (Scottish Govt'). However, the main point being made relates to the inability to measure effectiveness which is mirrored in the academic literature. Indeed, academic studies in relation to the work of school liaison officers are rare.

Exceptions include Hopkins, Hewstone and Hantzi (1992), Hopkins (1994), Jackson (2002), Brown (2006), Lyle and Hendley (2007). Brown (2006) has confirmed that prior to the 1990s the practice of assigning sworn police officers to serve in schools on a full-time basis was uncommon and that academically little attention was devoted to understanding the actual role of school police officers. Hopkins, Hewstone and Hantzi (1992) argued that the influence of SLOs was minimal over time and that the young people in their study regarded their SLOs as being atypical from other police officers. Presumably the same could be said of Crime Reduction officers.

According to Hopkins (1994) pupils clearly differentiated between SLOs and those 'on the street' and their perceptions of the qualitatively different social relations between young people and the police 'in the school' and 'on the street'. Jackson (2002), in an American context, found a similar attitude and argued that since schools should utilize their financial resources for counseling, student-faculty crime prevention programs or delinquency awareness programs instead. However, wholesale closure of existing programmes would be inadvisable without further research and consideration of lean methodology (Parker and Smith, 2009).

Although it is tempting to disband such specialist units it may be years before the effects are obvious. However, there is another option. Much of the work of SLOs is both repetitive and performative. In some forces, the SLO designs a lecture or material and delivers it personally in as many schools as he or she can during a term. In other forces, Campus Cops' remit expressly excludes classroom work. One solution would be to film and digitize the lessons to be delivered in school at times more flexible to the school curriculum. This digitization would allow generic lessons to be videoed for future display. Although initially time intensive this would save countless hours of valuable police time. This would allow a small core of such officers to be kept and the work continued. The same could be done for much of the advice dispensed by Crime Reduction Officers. Instead of visits by CROs after a break-in a DVD of crime prevention advice could be pre recorded and delivered as a DVD or as a download. The CROs could concentrate on training company personnel in Crime Survey techniques. The same could be done for Neighbourhood Watch start ups etc. It is also significant that many of the better SLOs, CBOs and CROs work best when given freedom to operate autonomously and even entrepreneurially (Smith, 2008). This is also true of ASB units. Such units operate independently, and over time the local Command trust that the officers will develop and take ownership of useful community initiatives. A drawback of this approach is that their work load may grow exponentially and that if the work is not directed or commissioned via the NIM process then some of the work may not contribute to local crime strategies, nor dovetail with the work of other parts of the community policing apparatus.

It is apparent that there are many overlaps between the services provided by different sections of the community policing apparatus. If all community policing actions were mapped across the units and innovations sought for alternative provision then real savings could be made whilst still maintaining a core quality of service. In this manner although the physical number of officers would be reduced the outputs could be maintained. This would also allow for an amalgamation of skills and duties into a smaller core of multi skilled community orientated officers. These savings could be multiplied if the process were mapped across other agencies involved in the process. If all community policing were directed towards early intervention measures and to tackling the issue of inter generational transmission of crime through tackling and reducing the number of criminal families, the potential societal benefits could be huge.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

To date there has been no empirical analysis of Early Intervention Programmes in a policing context. It is hoped that the research presented here may spark a debate on a number of issues, including the definition and role of Early Intervention Officers in the wider context of community policing. A limitation of the study is that it was conducted via a trawl of the internet and by research based conversations with a limited number of serving police officers. It is hoped that a wider empirical survey will confirm and replicate the results. Innovative practices can make a tremendous difference and in an age of austerity there is a need to ensure value for money. An audit of community work and a streamlining of the process may produce a leaner but more effective community policing model where early intervention is the key ethos. As this is work in progress, the author would like to encourage discussion and debate and would welcome contact from any interested agencies.

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