

Prevention First – Hertfordshire Constabulary

The Prevention First strategy embeds prevention in the force's approach to reducing all crime types, including homicide and serious violence.

First published 12 July 2023

Overview

This is a [smarter practice example](#).

Hertfordshire Constabulary's 2019 Serious Violence Needs Assessment (unpublished) demonstrated the prevalence of knife crime, gangs and county lines within Hertfordshire. The report recommended that a whole system approach should be adopted by the force to address serious violence - with a particular emphasis on crime prevention.

In response, Hertfordshire sought to embed crime prevention throughout all force activity. As part of this, the Prevention First strategy was implemented in 2020 to embed prevention in the force's approach to reducing all crime types, including homicide and serious violence. The strategy includes the:

- Prevention First Academy – which will train all officers and staff to adopt a preventative approach to all areas of activity.
- Prevention First Hub and online Portal – which promotes problem solving and the use of research evidence across the force, providing tailored guidance and support for specific operational and organisational issues.

Problem

Office for National Statistics [data](#) demonstrates that the number of knife and sharp instrument offences increased by 62% in Hertfordshire between the years of April 2010 / March 2011 and October 2021 / September 2022. This increase was greater than the national average for England and Wales, which was 38.43% during the same time period (this excludes data from Greater Manchester Police).

Furthermore, [hospital admissions](#) for violence (including sexual violence) per 100,000 population has steadily increased in Hertfordshire between 2013 and 2020, from 27.9 in 2013 / 2014 – 2015 /

2016 to 40.5 in 2017 / 2018 – 2019 / 2020 (admissions per 100,000 slightly decreased between 2017/18 – 2019/20 and 2019/19 – 2020/21, but it is likely that this data was impacted by the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic).

Response

Hertfordshire Constabulary recognise the importance of adopting a public health approach to better understand and tackle the root causes of crime. The force identified that to achieve this it needed to build the capability of all staff in their understanding of prevention and problem solving.

This led to the development of the Prevention First strategy which had two main aims, which were:

- the prevention of harm
- the reduction of demand

Prevention First takes a whole-systems approach to crime, with a focus on problem solving, early intervention and prevention across all crime types. The force aims to ensure the workforce is equipped with the skills and knowledge to understand the causes and enablers of homicide and serious violence as well as the interventions to prevent them.

Prevention First is underpinned by two initiatives, the Prevention First Academy and the Prevention First Hub and Portal.

The Academy provides training for officers and staff on how to adopt a preventative approach across policing. It aims to teach participants how to solve problems and equip them with the confidence to do so.

The Prevention First Portal enables officers and staff to use an online form to submit ideas, initiatives or operational issues they are facing in their role to a central Hub. Staff in the Prevention First Hub then provide tailored support by scanning the evidence base relating to their problem and identifying examples of practice in other forces. For example, the Hub team are currently in the scanning phase of a project looking at reducing offences of knife crime possession in males under the age of 25. This includes reviewing and summarising academic research, identifying examples of existing practice, mapping out available interventions and signposting to relevant partner agencies.

This initiative was informed by [New Zealand's Prevention First model](#), similarly focused on harm reduction, evidence based policing, the drivers of police demand and effective partnership working.

During the implementation phase, the force also drew on learning from [Police Scotland’s Crime Prevention Strategy](#) and the [NHS’s Flow Coaching Academy](#).

Prevention First logic model

<p>Problem</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in serious violence, including knife crime, gangs, county lines. • Knife crime increasing more than in any other force in the last five years. • Reactive demand outstripping resource.
<p>Response – Academy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of an Academy training officers and staff about the Prevention First approach.
<p>Response – Portal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of an online Portal encouraging officers and staff to submit ideas or queries.
<p>Response – Hub</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a Hub designed to use evidence to address issues or ideas, such as those submitted through the portal
<p>Outputs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of officers and staff participating in the Academy. • Number of entries submitted to the Portal by officers and staff. • Number of topics or issues scanned, analysed or evaluated by the Hub team.

Outcomes

- Improved understanding and application of problem solving and evidence-based policing.
- Increased confidence among officers and staff to adopt an innovative approach to their work in preventing crime.
- Reduced duplication of work across the force.

Implementation

Hertfordshire's Chief Constable set the overarching vision for Prevention First, encouraging staff at all levels to take responsibility for designing and implementing the model.

An implementation board consisting of senior officers was established to oversee the introduction of Prevention First. The board was responsible for making key decisions about its delivery, including funding, staffing and the aims and structure of the model.

How does Prevention First work?

The Academy

There are four modules that have been designed by the implementation team for the Prevention First Academy.

- Leadership module – which includes 'Learning for Prevention', a five day in-person training course for chief inspectors, inspectors and sergeants (and staff equivalents), covering topics including problem solving, reflective learning, situational leadership, evidence-based policing and coaching. It aims to help first line leaders create environments with supportive leadership and an emphasis on wellbeing and inclusion, which encourages officers and staff to find innovative ways to prevent harm. This was co-designed with the Durham University Policing Research Unit and informed by their [Frontline Policing Review](#), [National Wellbeing Survey results](#) and the [National Inclusion Survey](#).

- Specialist module (partially implemented) – this is targeted towards the Prevention First Hub team and ambassadors. It will provide a Level 2 qualification to constables and a Level 3 qualification to sergeants and inspectors, using the College of Policing’s crime prevention training package. Elements of the training include a problem solving course by criminologist Sylvia Chenery.
- Foundation module provides all officers and staff (around 3,500 people) with online training regarding evidence based policing, working with partners and increasing public confidence. The module is also delivered to all students undertaking the police education qualification framework. The force worked with an expert academic to create the online content for this module.
- Practitioner module (partially implemented) – this is a two day in-person event including 10 lessons on the [SARA model](#), aimed at operational staff. Elements of the course have been implemented in training days. However, it is anticipated that this will be an ongoing training supplemented over time with additional workshops.

The live training packages focus on empowering staff to lead teams to take a prevention first, problem solving mindset. It is values-based training that encourages the use of evidence to understand problems and the adoption of [SARA](#) and the [National Decision Model](#). The Academy is led by a coordinator staff member equivalent to the rank of Chief Inspector. There are three trainers in the delivery team who all have a Level 4 Award in Education and Training. The Leading for Prevention course is delivered by two teams; the Academy team deliver training on prevention and problem solving, while the leadership aspect is delivered by leaders within the force.

Recipients choose an issue they might face in their role, such as an increase in knife carrying, and think about how to solve the problem using tools such as [de Bono six thinking hats](#) (a tool used to think about decision making from six different perspectives – facts, benefits, cautions, feelings, ideas and planning) and risk assessments.

At the end of the training, participants receive an action plan, which must be completed within three months of finishing the training. Participants are required to conduct [scanning](#) and [analysis](#) into the issue they identified during the course, implement a [response](#) and consider how the initiative could be [assessed](#).

Enablers for implementation

Organisational Culture

Clear and visible leadership from senior leaders is critical to bringing about the shift in organisational culture required to fully embed the Prevention First approach across all force activities. Frequent communication about the approach with staff across the force, and direct engagement with front line officers, helps to build momentum and understanding and contributes to developing the right conditions for cultural change.

Informal nature of the training process

The Academy takes an informal and agile approach, holding the training on non-police premises, such as a local hotel. Participants wear non-uniform to take emphasis away from ranks. This decision was informed by the theory of psychological safety and how people are more likely to be open-minded and relaxed when they do not fear talking honestly in front of senior staff. Anecdotal feedback from the attendees has been positive, and the organisers believe that the external location means there are less distractions than if training was held in police premises.

Dedicated resources

The resource structure for Prevention First consists of 20 officers and staff, including a superintendent and chief inspector. Most of the sergeant and constable roles are in the process of being recruited to but are currently vacant due to recruitment challenges. Those working in Prevention First are required to have knowledge and skills in the following areas: enhanced problem solving, research skills, evidence-based policing and Office 365.

Partnerships

The force have an effective research partnership with the Open University's [Centre for Policing Research and Learning](#) and have worked with them during the development of Prevention First.

Outcomes and impact

Academy

636 leaders have received the Learning for Prevention module through the Academy (as of the end of August 2022). The remaining 80 will complete the training by the end of this year. Pre and post event echo surveys have been conducted for 28 Academy cohorts so far, collecting qualitative and quantitative feedback using a QR code.

Feedback is positive, with nine out of ten participants stating they would recommend the course to a colleague. Anecdotal benefits of the Academy include officers leaving the training feeling empowered and motivated to think of innovative ways to prevent crime and seek out problem-solving opportunities.

Academy learning is assessed through a daily reflective learning journal, a self-assessed learning questionnaire completed pre- and post-training and oral feedback.

A sergeant at the force is currently evaluating the Leading for Change module as part of his MSc. This involves surveying all previous Academy participants to determine the extent to which they have retained their learning and applied it in their role. This will be completed in 2023.

Durham University has been commissioned to conduct a longitudinal evaluation looking at the impact of Leading for Prevention on cultural change within the force. This will be completed in 2023.

Portal and Hub

Monthly updates regarding the submissions sent to the Portal are provided by the Prevention First superintendent to the organisational strategic review board. There were 233 submissions between January 2022 and 19 December 2022. Over half of these have been addressed by the Hub team. The force report positive feedback from those who have used the resource and greater creation of innovative ideas within the force.

Learning and recommendations

Hertfordshire Constabulary recommend that the following factors should be considered when implementing a similar initiative.

- The Hub should ensure that they are working alongside key internal stakeholders, such as serious violence portfolio leads, within the area they are researching. This will help ensure they are not working in silo, and that work isn't duplicated.
- Prevention First is a whole force approach, and requires cultural and organisational change to fully embed. Prevention needs to be seen as a priority across all crime types. This requires senior leadership support to drive change across the whole organisation.

- Reflective practice should be encouraged. Not only does the Prevention First team highlight promising practice, they also recognise the importance of acknowledging and understanding when something has gone wrong. They capture this to ensure any learning is shared appropriately. The Prevention First team regularly sits on operational debriefs to support wider reviews of practice.

About smarter practice

This is a smarter practice report. This means the activity has been reviewed by experienced practitioners from the College of Policing and partner agencies, and is considered suitable for further testing by other forces and organisations.

- [About smarter practice](#)

Practice bank

- [See Hertfordshire Constabulary's write-up of this approach in our practice bank](#)

Tags

Crime reduction