

Project Noxa – managing risk of harm in the community

A partnership initiative to identify individuals in the community causing the most harm. Individuals are tiered by risk level and their behaviour is addressed using the 4P framework: pursue, prevent, protect and prepare.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Diversion Prevention Reoffending
Topic	Offender management Violence (other)
Organisation	Devon and Cornwall Police
HMICFRS report	PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Devon and Cornwall Police
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Region	South West

Key details

Partners	Police Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Local authority
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	August 2023
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people

Aim

The aims of the project are to introduce:

- a multi-agency partnership approach to identify individuals in the community at risk of causing the most harm
- a dynamic mapping process, comprising of police and Devon and Cornwall's social care services and child exploitation team, who will assess and identify those individuals causing the most harm

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are to:

- reduce the theft of motorbikes and mopeds
- reduce the number of adults exploiting young people

Description

In June 2023, Project Noxa was developed to assist South Devon Police in focussing on its highest harm perpetrators. Initially, the project was designed to address a two-fold problem:

- a significant increase in moped and motorbike thefts with operational attempts to address the offending had failed
- an increase in unreported injuries of young people following motorbike road traffic collisions (RTCs), and in police related accidents on the road involving young riders (POLACs) with a recognisable risk of a death or serious injury of a young person if it was not addressed

South Devon has a background of youth anti-social behaviour (ASB) and violence, which presented a clear and significant risk. Reactive and pro-active operations had been implemented, but the tactics used failed to address some of the more complex issues. These include young people being out of education, pressured by societal influence and exploited by those above them in a social setting.

In an initial scoping exercise, it was identified that between 250 – 300 thefts were reported over a one-year period. Intelligence or investigation linked these crimes to over 100 young people in the area, who had been linked to previous operations within the area responsible for violence, damage, or drugs.

The force reviewed the complex problem of young people involved in the nightly targeting of stealing mopeds and motorbikes. The investigations and intelligence implied there was a semi-organisation of over one hundred subjects, with the youngest and most vulnerable committing shoplifting to obtain tools to be either used in crime or items to conceal identity. The older teens and adults surveyed items to steal and nightly attempts. There was a smaller number of adults that would receive stolen items and pay for goods with cash or drugs.

Project Noxa is a multi-agency panel made up of police and Devon and Cornwall's social care services and child exploitation team. The different agencies can each refer offenders to the panel for consideration. Offenders are then reviewed during a monthly panel in which the agencies share information and intelligence on each offender. The offenders are then assigned to one of three different tiers:

- tier three – suspected or perceived to be causing the most overall harm. Parameters include links to crime through Niche (the force's record management system).

- tier two – include links to crime through Niche, for those already awaiting Youth offending teams (YOT), youth or adult criminal justice decisions, information and intelligence, perceived social-media presence, and have tangible links to other tiered subjects
- tier one – people that have either been linked to crimes through Niche (particularly first time offenders), those already awaiting YOT or Youth Criminal Justice decisions, information and intelligence (specifically around being exploited), and have tangible links to the tiers above them

Newly identified individuals are discussed at each panel. People that have previously been tiered are also reviewed and moved up or down tiers if necessary.

The introduction of the tier system showcased clear harm-based decision-making around priorities and resources. It also influenced a clear understanding of ownership and accountability for the agencies participating. The project sits above other ongoing and future operations that were designed to address young people committing crime and ASB like an umbrella, identifying and addressing those most responsible on a subject-based approach. Each tier then has a set outcome of work agreed by each agency.

Tier three

Tier three subjects are managed by the force. Targets for tier three subjects are raised at the monthly tactical meeting set by the chief superintendent. A child or adult 4P (Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare) problem solving plan is put in place to address the offending. This would be assigned to an inspector acting as lead responsible officer (LRO) to manage the plan.

The LRO responsibilities include:

- reviewing all crime linked to the person, including suspect status, investigation plans and fast-track actions and liaising with the relevant officers in charge
- a review of all intelligence regarding the person and identifying information gaps and tasking detective superintendents
- a review of associates
- identifying any exploitation concerns
- creating a 4P approach with partners

Tier two

Tier two identified individuals are jointly managed by police and partner agencies. They are discussed fortnightly in tactical meetings. Collective agreement is sought between interested parties regarding what preventative or pursue activities would be taking place. This tier was also split into three (red, amber, and green). This gives the panel an opportunity to review relevant crimes, intelligence and information and decide as to whether individuals' tier status should be adjusted. If the situation similar to the month before, they remain in the same place on the tier, with a potential review of the tactics or intervention. Tier twos are largely managed by neighbourhood policing teams. The neighbourhood teams take a problem-solving approach through either engagement or targeting, depending on the threat.

Tier one

Tier one subjects are contacted by the youth intervention team and receive support from policing partners. The aim is to prevent further exploitation and divert their activity away from crime or association.

The project underwent a review during Summer 2024. The primary focus was examining the number of theft of mopeds and motorbikes by young people residing in and around Torbay. However, following the review, Project Noxa's focus was expanded to focus on a wider range of offences causing community harm, such as repeat offending ASB and shoplifting.

During the review, the force changes the process of submitting perpetrator for Project Noxa with a speculative scoring form. The new scoring form is made up of 12 weighted questions meant to indicate the need to concentrate on an individual. The submitter will then obtain a speculative score. The form will be reviewed by a youth intervention officer sergeant. The new process means that when the perpetrator reached the review, the panel will have an indicator as to which tier the subject will attain. This allows for interventions at an earlier stage, making the process quicker. This is still reviewed by the chair and can be adjusted based on available information and intelligence. This is a new system and is currently under review.

The aim of this change was to ensure that more focus was put on those at the tier one stage more quickly. This has allowed for early intervention and diversion to remove opportunities for the tier ones to go on and commit crime. Previously, there was not as much ongoing work for tier one subjects.

The tier three response has been significant, with a serious reduction in criminality and exploitation. This has allowed the Project Noxa team to refocus on tier ones, providing intervention at a much earlier stage and preventing young people from exploitation or committing crime. Tier two and three subject thresholds remain and are very much owned and driven by the police, with partnership support.

After Summer 2024, due to unforeseen circumstances, the project has not been brought back fully as it is currently undergoing a change in leadership. Tier three subjects are still being reviewed. However, reviewing tier two and three subjects is currently paused until further notice, though subjects are still being tiered.

Evaluation

An evaluation will be conducted by Liverpool John Moores University which will look at the impact of the intervention.

Overall impact

A series of preventative or pursue tactics were employed to reduce the offending once the panel was operational and subjects were being identified. This was successful and the theft series was significantly reduced, with offenders brought to justice and vulnerable young people safeguarded. The theft of motorbikes and moped has significantly reduced from 250 - 300 thefts over the year, to now only occurring rarely.

Project Noxa is now embedded into daily practice, with tier three subjects reviewed on the daily management meeting agenda with the LRO's, continuing to drive activity around addressing their behaviour and co-ordinating investigations.

Another observable impact has been that several young people have moved down tiers on the Noxa scale. This was a result of them being safeguarded and protected from either an escalation in behaviour or being exploited. A large number of the identified subjects still reside within the geography and can be put forward to panel again, should the offending or intelligence suggest a co-ordinated approach is required.

Learning

- Previously, the local police's response to crime trends only focused on the signs rather than the symptoms. Multiple operations were running which were reacting to the crime type and a number of the subjects either responsible or linked within the community. Noxa provided the force with an overarching response that allowed it to share dynamic intelligence and information with partners. The force also adopted a subject-specific approach to offenders who are committing the most community harm or have the largest influence on those around them.
- There are always a maximum of five tier three offenders. Focussing on a very few top tier subjects means that the resources could be directly tasked and make the biggest impact on those most responsible and safeguard those either coming to harm or being exploited.
- Although the initial structure of Project Noxa was sufficient, it was identified that the project needed to focus more on tier one intervention work to prevent escalation of crime and exploitation.

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