

Street outreach service to prevent violence

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Practice note: preventing violence in local hot spots through a street outreach service

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For the last four years, I led Leicestershire Police's tactical delivery of Home Office Grip-funded hot spots policing to tackle serious violence. My colleague, Jonathan Smith, coordinates hot spot patrols to ensure their effectiveness.

Hot spots policing

We have implemented hot spots policing approaches effectively using police resources, including using a dedicated hot spots policing team working in the city of Leicester. However, we recognised that there were gaps in our delivery.

- Police resources are always at risk of being abstracted away from hot spot patrols – for example, by making arrests or dealing with emergencies near a hot spot.
- Leicestershire, like many forces, still occasionally uses police officers working overtime to conduct hot spot patrols. While this adds more capacity, it also adds cost, with overtime police patrols costing £3.38 on average per minute spent in hot spots.
- There was a challenge with engagement. We noticed that violent crime hot spots were also areas of vulnerability, attracting young and at-risk individuals. Identifying and addressing root causes was challenging, as many were reluctant to engage with the police.

Street outreach service

To address these gaps, we used part of our Home Office Grip funding to work with a local social care and health provider, Turning Point, to run a street outreach service. This service aims to engage with, and problem-solve issues for, vulnerable people while providing additional visible presence to support police efforts to prevent crime.

This service was inspired by detached youth work approaches and violence interrupter models, where 'interrupters' use their lived experience to engage and build relationships with those at risk to prevent violence. The service combines these approaches with data-driven hot spots policing methods to target and track micro-hot spot patrols.

The service runs from 2pm to 8pm, which is a peak time for youth-related violence in the city of Leicester. We identified seven serious violence hot spots within Leicester city centre, where the street outreach service patrols for a period of 40 minutes per hot spot.

The street outreach team wear a distinctive blue uniform, consistent with the brand identity of Turning Point. Their role is to engage young and vulnerable people in that hot spot, and to provide targeted support and advice. The outreach staff are issued with a global positioning system (GPS) tracker device to enable the duration and location of the patrols to be tracked by Leicestershire Police.

Although police officers and street outreach service staff members patrol the same hot spots, they do not patrol together. This is because it is important for the public to see that they are separate services delivering separate functions.

Evaluation

We worked with the Cambridge Centre for Evidence-Based Policing to [evaluate the street outreach service](#) over a 47-week period, from February 2023 to January 2024.

Comparing the 11 months before and during the intervention, a significant drop was observed in serious violent crime and harm. Crime incidents fell by 39% (from 416 to 252). The harm score (measured by the Cambridge Crime Harm Index) decreased by 36% (from 60,314 to 38,421), indicating both reduced frequency and severity. These reductions appear to outperform crime reductions in other similar-sized cities in the Midlands that are also working on the Home Office Grip programme.

The trial compared crime levels (count and harm) in the seven hot spots on days with and without street outreach patrols. Results showed a consistent, statistically significant reduction in both crime volume and harm on days when street outreach patrols were present. Results also suggest it is

more cost-effective. At £2.28 per minute, street outreach patrols were 32.5% cheaper than police patrols.

Case study

There have been numerous case studies showing the positive benefit of the service to vulnerable people in hot spots. In one example, a woman who was in a hot spot area looked visibly distressed. The team discovered that she had recently arrived in the UK from Ghana and had been abandoned by her husband, leaving her homeless.

With the help of the team, she accessed emergency shelter and food. Her relief was apparent, with her stating that she would have been left destitute without the support offered that day.

The street outreach service has been in place since October 2022 and is still implemented in Leicester city centre.

Learning

All police forces in receipt of Home Office Hotspot Action funding are now being asked to seek the support of partner agencies to conduct patrols in hot spots.

We have therefore identified the following main learning points, which forces may wish to consider when setting up such approaches.

- Third-party provider-led approaches to hot spots policing should complement, not replace, police-led approaches.
- The success of the approach is dependent on the quality of the third-party provider and the credibility of their staff with the people whom the service engages with – choosing staff to work on the project with lived experience and/or significant expertise in supporting vulnerable people is preferable.
- It is important to value the staff, listen to them and co-create changes to the plan in order to secure their engagement.

- Regular briefing and debriefing of staff, in addition to using GPS data, was crucial in improving the quality of patrols.
- Originally, the patrol periods were set at 15 minutes, however, this was increased to 40 minutes to ensure enough time to allow for detailed conversations to take place.

This article was peer reviewed by Detective Chief Inspector John Askew, West Midlands Police.

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