

City centre team to target drugs, anti-social behaviour and acquisitive crime

Lincoln City Centre Policing Team work with partners to reduce the harm caused by drugs, incidents of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and acquisitive crime.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Acquisitive crime Anti-social behaviour Drugs and alcohol offences
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Region	East Midlands
Partners	Police Business and commerce Community safety partnership Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation

Key details

Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	September 2018
Scale of initiative	Regional
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities Offenders Victims Women

Aim

The aim of the initiative is to:

- form a city centre policing team to manage the impact of legal highs across Lincoln city centre
- work with partner agencies to provide a more targeted and co-ordinated response to the use of legal highs incidents of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and acquisitive crime
- promote a safe and inclusive environment by encouraging positive behaviours and reducing harm through education, engagement, and enforcement

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the initiative are to:

- reduce the number of incidents of ASB and acquisitive crime by addressing issues that impact community safety
- improve community confidence by maintaining a visible, accessible, and approachable presence to reassure the public
- enhance relationships with partnership agencies to provide support and safeguard individuals at risk

Description

In 2018, the increase in use of legal highs became an emerging challenge to police in Lincoln city centre. There was an increase in demand on both police and NHS resources, with communities feeling intimidated by individuals under the influence of the drug.

Team and resources

To address the emerging challenge, the force abstracted one officer from each shift to create a Lincoln City Centre Policing Team, consisting of one sergeant and five police constables. During the summertime, the team is increased to seven constables by adding two on development attachments. Each team member was selected for their transferable skills and operational experience. By abstracting officers, this enabled rapid mobilisation without compromising core service delivery. The development and running of the team is cost-neutral, with no requirement for supplementary funding.

Officers who are on management restrictions support the team by preparing and submitting criminal behaviour order (CBO) applications, interviewing prisoners and submitting case files.

The establishment of the team received senior leadership approval which has provided assurance of governance and alignment with organisational priorities. The team operates within an established framework of accountability, ensuring its activities contribute to both local and national objectives.

Implementation

The team use analytics to identify a cohort of high-harm offenders who are responsible for anti-social behaviour (ASB) incidents, drug use, and acquisitive crime. Research is then conducted to determine if individuals would be suitable for a CBO. The team examine magistrate sentencing guidelines to align activity more closely with judicial expectations and identify where the offender is currently linked to the criminal justice system, such as on a community order or suspended sentence.

The team then conduct a CBO satisfaction test applied by magistrates which has two conditions:

- does the subject specifically cause harassment, alarm and distress, and to whom?
- why is the CBO necessary?

If an individual is suitable, the team draft a CBO to ensure they progress in the criminal justice system or divert them to the most appropriate partner who can provide a positive intervention.

Lincolnshire Police work with the following partners:

- City of Lincoln Council - Rough Sleeper Team, Public Protection, ASB Team
- Lincoln Business Improvement Group (BIG)
- Project Compass
- YMCA
- Nomad Trust
- University of Lincoln - Student Wellbeing Department
- Bishop Grosseteste Students Union
- Lincolnshire County Council
- Trading Standards
- NHS Lincolnshire
- Lincolnshire Police and Crime Commissioner
- Probation Service
- Safer Lincolnshire Partnership
- The Children's Society
- Lincolnshire Recovery Partnership

Operational and tactical meetings are held with relevant partners. The purpose of these meetings is to create a structured environment for information sharing, joint decision-making, and continuous improvement of processes. These meetings enable the evolution of referral pathways and response protocols, ensuring that everyone is assessed holistically and directed to the most appropriate service. The best-placed agency takes ownership of each case, resulting in tailored support and improved outcomes for the individuals involved.

If partner intervention is not appropriate, criminal investigations are prioritised based on the suspect's position within the criminal justice system. This is to enable resources to focus on offenders causing the greatest harm and maximise effective court sentencing that reflects their offending record.

Overall impact

Main outcomes

- The team has enhanced community protection and provided an effective response to harms caused by legal highs, acquisitive crime and ASB. This was achieved through refining processes, collaborating with partners and being flexible to the daily demand of a city centre.
- There has been a reduction in acquisitive crime and ASB incidents, as well as an increase in successful CBO applications.
- The initiative has been rolled out to other neighbourhood policing areas.
- Nottinghamshire Police trialled the model and are rolling the initiative out force-wide.
- The Metropolitan Police Service has shown interest in adopting the working practice in teams that deal with high-harm offenders.

Feedback

Lincoln City Centre Policing Team recently won Lincolnshire Police team of the year. The following testimonials have been provided by partners who supported the nomination.

- “This team are an integral part of the partnership which enables the service to run as smoothly as it does, they are present, responsive, approachable and dedicated.”
- “The City Centre Team show compassion and support vulnerable adults within the high street areas to minimise the risks to them whilst in the public. Their work in supporting mental health clients to ensure they remain safe, attend appointments and linking in other agencies is outstanding. The team go above and beyond their duties to protect the public and deliver a safer community for residents and visitors to this historic city.”
- “The team is extremely dedicated to keeping the city centre safe. They have worked very hard over the years to build relationships with all agencies in the city. This means we all can do our jobs more efficiently and have a great partnership in the city as well as extremely good intelligence. I know other areas are trying to replicate what Lincoln has as it is a huge success story for all agencies here.”

Learning

What went well

- A success of the initiative has been the committed collaboration among partner agencies, who quickly aligned with the shared vision.

- A clearly defined cohort of individuals were identified at the outset, allowing for targeted intervention and consistent oversight.
- The operational and tactical meetings have enhanced service delivery and demonstrated the value of integrated working in achieving sustainable person-centred solutions.
- The initiative delivered measurable improvements across multiple domains. The use and supply of legal highs saw a reduction, contributing to a decrease in related incidents and associated harm. This, in turn, has reduced demand on NHS services, particularly emergency and mental health care.
- The visible impact on the city has been noticeable, with public spaces becoming cleaner and more welcoming. This has contributed to an improved sense of safety and wellbeing among residents and visitors.

Recommendations

- For teams seeking to replicate this approach, it is essential to establish a clearly defined remit from the outset. This remit must be effectively communicated internally, particularly to first and second-line managers, to ensure clarity around the team's purpose and function. A lack of understanding has led to confusion among staff and requests for team members to backfill response roles, which has undermined the initiative's focus.
- It is important to implement a performance framework with clear metrics from the outset. Initially the force operated without one, which made it difficult to evidence impact and justify continuation of the team. Managers struggled to quantify the outcomes being achieved, which affected support and sustainability. A robust framework not only supports accountability but also helps demonstrate value across strategic priorities.

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