

Focussed deterrence (FD) – identifying and supporting high-risk young people

The focussed deterrence (FD) project aims to identify and support high-risk young people to reduce serious violence and offending using tailored interventions.

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Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Diversion
Topic	Violence including homicide Vulnerability and safeguarding
Organisation	Wiltshire Police
Contact	Chris Williams
Email address	chris.williams1@wiltshire.police.uk
Region	South West
Partners	Police Community safety partnership Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Education Health services Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation

Key details

Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	July 2023
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people Offenders

Aim

The aim of the FD project is to:

- identify and support young people who are at risk of becoming involved in gangs or serious violence
- identify offending behaviours and divert young people towards positive pathways over a 12-month period
- provide tailored interventions for young people to address specific needs and risk factors
- assess the project's influence on participants engagement in education, employment or training (EET), missing episodes and the likelihood of receiving custodial sentences

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the FD project are to:

- reduce the number of offending behaviours. This includes a targeted reduction in:
 - total offences
 - violent offences
 - robbery offences

- weapon offences
- criminal damage offences
- public order offences
- drug offences

- reduce the number of missing person episodes of young people
- reduce the likelihood of young people receiving custodial sentences
- increase young peoples' participation in EET

Description

The FD project has been implemented to address the increasing concern of youth violence across Wiltshire. In 2023, data revealed a rise in the number of first-time entrants into the youth criminal justice system. The FD project has been developed as a proactive, evidence-based response, aligning with the requirements of the serious violence duty.

Planning process

The design of the FD project is influenced by the [focused deterrence model](#), evidence from the [Youth Endowment Fund](#) and approaches such as the Boston Ceasefire model. The project leads also utilised their previous experience of implementing focused deterrence initiatives.

The FD project uses child-centred and multi-agency approaches:

- dual strategy – using combined offers of tailored support to facilitate routes out of offending with clear communication about enforcement consequences should harmful behaviours persist
- adaptive learning – the FD project has been flexible to learn from the pilot phase in Devizes before a wider rollout across Wiltshire and Swindon
- engagement method – implementing a steering group to encourage collaborative meetings with the young person and their family to agree on interventions

Roles and teams

The project relies on extensive multi-agency collaboration, coordinated primarily by Wiltshire Council's Young People's Service. The key stakeholders are:

- coordinator – Wiltshire Council's Young People's Service
- funding administrator – Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Wiltshire and Swindon
- strategic oversight – Serious Violence Duty Joint Steering Group (SVD JSG)
- enforcement partner – Wiltshire Police
- decision-making – the FD panel considered referrals, assessed suitability, and agreed upon the principle of intervention
- delivery partners – community organisations providing youth work, mentoring, education, and therapeutic support, such as In Tune Mentoring, Legend Inclusive Training, Olas Art, Barefoot Barns, and Dave & Ewe are involved in the delivery of the FD project

Implementing the FD project

In 2023, phase one (pilot phase) of the project commenced which focused on the Devizes area. The identification of at-risk young people in Devizes was managed through established multi-agency forums and professional vigilance. Potential participants for the project were identified:

- through serious youth panel (SYP) context meetings
- via strategic meetings
- as a professional concern by practitioners

A referral was then made to the FD panel for assessment and agreement on the principle of intervention.

Following agreement from the panel, consent is sought from the young person and their family to participate. Each cohort member is then profiled at the FD Panel, noting the significant levels of vulnerability such as:

- social care involvement
- special educational needs (SEN)
- disengagement from EET

Project staff then meet with the young person and their family to discuss the available options and offer a tailored package of support to suit their individual needs and circumstances. Interventions can include:

- education and training – one-to-one tuition for obtaining a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card for construction employment and Maths or English tuition for excluded children
- wellbeing and diversionary activities – therapeutic sessions at Barefoot Barns or Dave & Ewe which specialise in trauma recovery and supporting children with additional needs, other activities can include vocal recording and graffiti art classes
- mentoring and youth work – services which specialise in violence reduction and exploitation risk

The FD project also uses police strategies when working with young people to address the wider network of offending if engagement failed or violence continued.

Funding and senior management approval

The FD project received £75,000 from the Home Office's Serious Violence Duty grant and has been administered by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Wiltshire and Swindon. The FD project is managed by Wiltshire Council's Young People's Service, with the support of the OPCC and Wiltshire Police.

Evaluation

An [evaluation](#) was completed in June 2025 and was led by C J Williams Consulting Ltd. The data analysis for the report was performed by Wiltshire Council.

The evaluation looked at the impact of the project on the offending behaviours and wider social outcomes of the young people involved. The evaluation employed an impact evaluation framework using a quasi-experimental design. This methodology involved tracking the longitudinal outcomes of the 41 young people in the project cohort and comparing them against a pre-selected comparator group of 39 young people with similar risk profiles who did not receive the FD interventions.

The analysis involved two main comparisons:

- comparing the FD cohort against their own baseline data from the 12 months prior to intervention

- comparing the changes observed in the FD cohort against the changes observed in the comparator group over the same two time periods

Quantitative data was primarily used, extracted from police records and Wiltshire Council's case management systems. Key findings from the evaluation indicate that the FD project was effective in reducing both offending and missing episodes among the target cohort.

- The FD cohort showed a 90% reduction in offending behaviour, significantly higher than the comparator group's 78% reduction in offending behaviour
- 88% of the cohort had a reduction in missing episodes, compared to 79% of the comparator cohort
- The project was particularly effective for high-risk young people with entrenched offending behaviours, likely due to the combination of enforcement pressure, consistent engagement, and tailored support

The evaluation also highlighted the importance of procedural justice and the need for credible, accessible support tailored to the needs of participants.

Overall impact

The Wiltshire Focussed Deterrence (FD) project successfully achieved its primary aims, demonstrating significant positive impacts on the target cohort, particularly in reducing serious and repeat offending.

Key outcomes

- procedural justice – the evaluation highlighted the importance of procedural justice and the requirement for support to be perceived as credible and accessible, enhancing community trust and cooperation
- need for education support – the cohort exhibited significant vulnerabilities, including high rates of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and high non-engagement in EET. This observation led to a recommendation for strengthening support in these areas
- comparing to previous approaches – the FD approach appeared more effective than traditional Youth Justice Service (YJS) approaches alone for this high-risk population

- multi-agency support – there has been a high level of support for the FD project, with officers from across the partnership acknowledging the importance of high-quality support and engagement necessary for the project's success
- participation engagement – young people engaged in the project reported that they were genuinely grateful for the opportunities offered and the hope inspired by the project

The success of the Wiltshire FD model has established a strong foundation for future violence reduction strategies.

Learning

What went well

- The FD project demonstrated that a structured, intensive intervention can achieve significant reductions in serious and repeat offending.
- The success of the FD project is directly linked to the combination of enforcement pressure, consistent engagement, and tailored support.
- The FD project ensures interventions are child-centred. Project staff meet collaboratively with the young person and family to agree on tailored packages of support based on individual needs and circumstances.
- The project successfully functions as a collaborative effort coordinated by Wiltshire Council's Young People's Service, involving significant support and partnership from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and Wiltshire Police.

Challenges and barriers

- The cohort profiles revealed significant challenges, including high levels of social care involvement, 72% were SEN and over 40% disengaged from EET. It was a challenge to address these complex, foundational needs through short-term intervention.
- An important aspect for effectiveness is ensuring that law enforcement actions and support offers are perceived as fair, consistent, and legitimate (procedural justice).
- A recognised limitation of the evaluation was the lack of established follow-up points post-intervention (e.g., six, 12, or 18 months), making it challenging to definitively monitor behavioural changes.

- While the project included one-to-one tuition and training, the consistently high rates of SEN and non-engagement in EET among the cohort led the report to recommend strengthening support around education and special educational needs in future iterations.

Recommendations

- It is essential to prioritise education and SEN support. Due to high educational vulnerabilities of high-risk youth, efforts should be made to strengthen support specifically around education and SEN, to ensure sustainable pathways out of crime.
- It is important not to limit the strategy to specific cohorts. Elements of the FD project such as the multi-agency panels, credible sanctions, and persistent engagement can be integrated into standard youth justice service and community safety practices.
- The support offered must be credible, accessible, and genuinely tailored to the participants' complex needs to maintain legitimacy and cooperation.
- Implement a robust mechanism to track long-term outcomes by introducing standardised follow-up points (e.g., six-, 12-, and 18-months post-intervention) to monitor the sustainability of the reduction in offending.

Best available evidence

The [Crime Reduction Toolkit](#) currently includes best-available evidence on [focused deterrence strategies](#) to reduce crime.

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