

News Release



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A MODEL FOR REDUCING YOUTH CRIME

East Renfrewshire is the model for how youth, gang and knife crime could be tackled across the country.

That's the findings from a study into the council's pioneering approach to addressing youth crime and anti social behaviour.

The research, carried out for the Scottish Government, reveals that the approach, which brings together the local agencies and services, has reduced crime levels across the council area.

People caught with offensive weapons, including knives, is down 21% from 122 in 2005 to 96 in 2007.

Referrals to the children's reporter have dropped by 31% from 212 in 2005 to 145 in 2007.

Vandalism was down from 1,846 incidents in 2005 to 1,563 incidents in 2007. There was a reduction in persistent offenders during the period studied with East Renfrewshire having one of the lowest and most improved results in Scotland.

The model adopted by East Renfrewshire Council is based on a successful Danish system for bringing together all local agencies involved in anti-social behaviour and youth offending.

The school, social work, police and community (SSPC) tackles aims to create strong communities and help families to break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage by focussing on tackling anti-social behaviour early on coupled with diversionary tactics.

And now researchers are recommending that this model, because of its success in reducing anti-social behaviour and youth offending, could be a "...useful and interesting model for the government to consider".

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The operational 'engine room' of the SSPC approach is the young person's referral group - a multi agency group led by social work and attended by the reporter to the children's panel along with all relevant agencies – police, youth services, schools, housing, community safety and voluntary organisations.

East Renfrewshire's health and social care convener, Councillor Douglas Yates, explained: "The group is able to offer guidance and assistance to young people who may be flirting with crime and their families. For example, the police may refer a young person who is a new face in a gang which can help to prevent a bystander from taking the next steps to becoming a perpetrator.

"The East Renfrewshire model has encouraged the professionals from all agencies and organisations to think and act outside their usual professional boundaries to deliver a better service to the young people, their families and communities. That's an approach that will have long term benefits for the residents of our area.

Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill said: "Young people are more likely to be a victim of crime than they are to commit a crime. We know that the vast majority are well behaved and a credit to their communities but we do need to tackle the small minority that cause problems.

"Our recently published Youth Justice Framework set out our approach for trying to make sure fewer young people are affected by the three 'Ds' of drink, drugs and deprivation that lead to a life of crime. It's based on prevention and early intervention with a focus on all relevant agencies working together to protect young people.

"The school, social work, police and community project pioneered in East Renfrewshire is an example of this type of approach.

"It's great that this evaluation gives us clear evidence that early and effective action by different professionals working together can have a massive impact on the lives of young people and communities. I hope other councils can learn from this approach and help make sure it can benefit as many young people as possible."

Three campus cops were appointed as part of the project. The officers are based in secondary schools in East Renfrewshire and provide a crucial link between community and school – sharing information, addressing issues of violence, cyber-bullying, anti social behaviour, drugs and gang related issues.

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They link between the school and the young persons referral group and also support other agencies in engaging with hard to reach young people through out of hours diversionary activities - such as special Duke of Edinburgh schemes.

A support worker was also hired with the joint skills of youth and family engagement.

Quotes from interviewees in the research report:

"In cases of tragedies, investigations usually find lack of effective joint working and information sharing as contributory factors. That is now minimised in East Renfrewshire"

"The teacher is there to give a quick resume of attendance and behaviour whereas I would have to request a school report, get it in writing etc and that can take time..." (Reporter to the children's panel)

"A much smaller percentage of my case load is made up of young people subject to supervision orders so early intervention seems to be having an impact" (social worker).

Conclusions from researchers:

The research was undertaken by Blake Stevenson Research Company during the period of January – May 2008.

The following is extracted from their research report:

"There was consensus across all interviewees that there has been a shift in organisational behaviour and culture as a result of the ethos and work of the YPRG and this has led to more effective and efficient use of resources. It can put support in place more swiftly than the Hearing system can. Individuals at the YPRG can commit to an intervention...individual professionals put themselves forward to assist with young people. If they had been limiting themselves to their strictly professional role, they might not have seen this as their job. There is little delay between the young person being referred and the group discussing their case and arriving at a decision"

"Shared aims, practice and ethos are at the core of what is making the SSPC approach and the YPRG operate successfully"

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"The Cops are clearly functioning extremely effectively and making an important contribution to an integrated, preventative approach to anti social behaviour and youth offending. Although based in schools, it is the strength of the Cops in linking the school to community and to social work and other agencies involved which is key. They should continue to be based in schools but, as now, not 'belong' to the school"

"The Young Person's Support Worker is a key role in relation to the YPRG and young people, working in a non stigmatising way..."

"In terms of the National Audit Office's Framework for assessing value for money, it would seem that as a result of the establishment of SSPC, for most mainstream agencies there has been an economy because they have not had to invest in additional staffing; there has been efficiency in that staff are working together and sharing a workload thus inputting less and achieving more by the way of output and the SSPC model has been effective"... "In some areas, particularly that of joint working, it has been exceptional"

"The project is a good fit with partner activity...strategically with prevention and integration...with problem solving, early intervention and violence reduction strategies of Strathclyde Police...with prevention strategies of the Fire and Rescue Service...This evaluation has found that the YPRG model is an excellent example of the GIRFEC ('Getting It Right for Every Child' Government priority policy) approach in practice, that is all agencies taking responsibility for ensuring that all young people are safe, respected, cared for and so on..The children and young people are put at the centre of the approach. It is a key strength of the group, and exemplary practice, that the members do not say 'that's not my remit'...although ostensibly concerned with the young person, it is evident that there is a whole family approach..."

" (SSPC has) achieved a rationalised approach to young people exhibiting anti social and offending behaviour across council departments, providing a measured and comprehensive response to community and agency concerns..Intervene in young people's lives with clear purpose, effectively and with the least intrusion necessary"

"It would seem, therefore, that the prevention and early intervention approach being undertaken in East Renfrewshire Council has had an effect on more serious young offenders and early indicators are that it would seem to be having an effect on less serious offenders...it would seem..that there has been a reduction in anti social behaviour and youth offending.. a useful and interesting model for the government to consider"

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NOTE TO EDITORS:

1. In 2005, East Renfrewshire Council implement an approach to preventing and addressing youth crime and anti social behaviour based upon Danish methods. Denmark has an internationally renowned approach that has led to low crime rates.
2. This is the first time in Britain, these methods have been combined with the campus police officer initiative.
3. Financial support for the new approach was received from the Scottish Government from April 2006 to April 2008.
4. A £30,000 external evaluation of the SSPC approach was commissioned by the Scottish Government following the pilot period with a view to considering its application more widely across Scotland.