



## **WEAPONS COURT HELPS REDUCE VIOLENCE IN INVERCLYDE**

A pioneering weapons court is helping to reduce levels of violence in Inverclyde.

Since it was established in June 2005, local police have recorded a substantial drop in serious violent crime involving weapons.

Figures for its first year of operation, show a 19 per cent reduction in serious assaults (195 to 158) and a drop of nine per cent of serious assaults involving knives, while serious assaults involving other weapons fell by 32 per cent.

The figures cover the period July 2005 to June 2006, compared to the same period in July 2004 to June 2005.

A first in Scotland, the weapons court sits every fortnight in Greenock Sheriff Court. It aims to fast track offenders who have been charged with carrying knives or other offensive weapons. The court is only one part of the wider Inverclyde Weapons Initiative which is a joint effort between Strathclyde Police, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and the Scottish Court Service.


Sub Divisional Officer, Superintendent David Stewart from Greenock Police Office, said:

“The Inverclyde Weapons Initiative is now one year old and we are delighted with these results. We have seen a substantial drop in levels of violent crime recorded in the Inverclyde area.

“Clearly any reduction in violence is to be welcomed, however, we are not complacent and we will continue to work with our partners to continue with this positive downward trend.”

The Inverclyde Weapons Initiative was established after growing concern about an apparent weapons culture in the local area. Research revealed that the vast proportion of violent crime in the area was committed using some type of weapon from knives to golf clubs.

The initiative aimed to reduce violent crime involving weapons, reduce weapon carrying and reduce the time taken from arrest to sentence.



Robust procedures were put in place to ensure the initiative – which cost nothing apart from the stakeholders' time – was successful. Police ensured that anyone caught using or carrying a weapon was either detained in custody until the next lawful day or liberated with an undertaking to attend the next weapons court. The Procurator Fiscal then ensured that appropriate bail conditions were attached to disposals on request from the police and that the relevant Fiscal Depute was aware of all the circumstances of the case.

To ensure a consistent and informed approach, it is normally the same Sheriff who presides over the weapons court. There is excellent co-operation and information sharing between the agencies and they meet on a monthly basis to ensure the initiative maintains its momentum.

Superintendent Stewart said:

“Overall, violent crime has fallen, the use of weapons in violent crime has fallen and the number of people caught carrying weapons in Inverclyde, has also fallen. The vast majority of offenders are reported as custody or undertaking and are now dealt with swiftly and consistently with the result being minimal re-offending.”

In other figures, the number of weapons stop searches rose by 22 per cent from 827 to 1011, however, the number of people caught with a weapon fell from 133 to 107 – a reduction of 19 per cent.

Superintendent Stewart added:

“It’s heartening to see that although we are increasing the number of people stopped and searched, the number of weapons actually recovered has fallen. Perhaps the message is finally getting out, that carrying knives and weapons on the streets of Inverclyde is not tolerated.

“However, there are clearly people still out there who think it’s acceptable to carry a weapon. We want to send out a strong message today, that we will not tolerate the carrying of knives and weapons in our community.

“We are committed to making the streets of Inverclyde safer for everyone.”