

West Lothian Community Safety Unit

Background

West Lothian Community Safety Unit (CSU) was formed in April 2010 bringing together partners with a diverse business remit from Lothian and Borders Police, West Lothian Council and Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue. Members include experts in fire prevention, crime prevention, road safety, anti-social behaviour, drugs awareness, analytical provision, performance management and community engagement.

All partners are based in the new West Lothian Civic Centre. In bringing partner agencies together physically, the CSU is seen to be an innovative approach to community safety, which aims to provide positive outcomes for residents in West Lothian by eradicating duplication and ensuring that everyone is working towards clear and shared objectives. The approach recognises that issues such as antisocial behaviour cannot be most effectively tackled by one single agency.

What has happened?

The Community Safety Unit is the hub of the Joint Tasking process. It coordinates resources where they are best needed to identify, prevent or solve issues across the 9 multi-member wards with early and effective intervention being a key theme.

The CSU's 'Focus On' initiatives have been very successful following on from the Focus on drugs in 2009 where 63 people were arrested. The Focus On Antisocial Behaviour & Environmental Damage in April 2010 saw a reduction in vandalism of 60% with environmental cleanup days, Fire Home Safety Checks and focussed patrolling ensuring the theme of engagement was foremost in everyone's minds.

Equally, the impact of the vandalism initiative in Whitburn saw a decrease of 18% in youth calls in 2 months in 2010 compared to the same two months the previous year and a 34% decrease in recorded vandalisms over the same period.

These early examples show that by bringing together all the partnership resources to work smarter and by developing intrinsic links with local communities West Lothian is a safer place.

Progression

The approach has led to better co-ordinated resources, work to assess and manage potential risk, increased partner agencies' focus on current problems and improved information-sharing and greater accountability.

Feedback from across the partnership, frontline staff involved and the community has been positive and the daily tasking process is now embedded into the working of the West Lothian Community Safety Unit and the wider partnership.

The focus of the CSU work is Prevention, Intervention and Diversion.

Tasking gathers information and intelligence from partnership databases, the public, businesses and councillors. This intelligence-led multi-agency approach manages and addresses risk and threat to the community and the partnership. This also facilitates smarter resource allocation, and has already resulted in higher numbers of home safety checks by Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service, media releases, early notification of youths involved in minor ASB to an early and effective intervention (EEI) group and youth services, and environmental clean-up days.

Some other examples of more recent activity are:

Operation Freeze, the new multi-agency response to tackling underage drinking in on sales premises has been a success for all partners involved (Police, Fire Service, Council and Voluntary Organisations). This initiative continues to enhance West Lothian's commitment to reducing alcohol misuse amongst young people and supports Operations Floorwalk (street intervention) and Froth (Test Purchasing).

Hate crimes in West Lothian have fallen by 14% (2008-09 to 2009-10), with the year-to-date figure (February 2010-11) currently showing a 27% decrease at the same point last year. There have been decreases in the number of repeat victims during this period also. Work continues with the lay advisor group, and changes to offering specific support for victims is currently underway. The Crime Reduction Booklet for BME Businesses and Violence Reduction Handbook have been widely distributed also.

Outcomes

Daily tasking has brought about a greater focus and accountability for the actions it generates. This is evident from examples such as fire and rescue data being available now on a daily basis rather than monthly, as well as a task log and key performance indicators having been developed for all individuals involved.

It has also had a number of positive impacts. These include young persons offences being discussed and measures introduced at a much earlier stage and resulting in fewer than two per cent committing an offence after EEI, and a decrease of 40 per cent in vandalisms and hate crime.

Joint strategic Assessment

The Joint Strategic Assessment is core to managing risk across West Lothian. During 2010-2011 year, the document received constant review as to its capacity with a view to developing a longer 3-year strategy in line with the Single Outcome Agreement and the Community Safety and Antisocial Behaviour Strategies.

It is planned to facilitate this in the period 2012-2015 given the current position of the SOA.

It has identified, through robust multi-agency scoring, five priorities with three cross-cutting issues. From these, action plans have been developed and are monitored through the Strategic Steering Group and recorded on Covalent. This allows that Golden Thread linkage from the Scottish Governments ideal down and through to the community.

Evaluation

As part of the continued development process, the CSU accepted support via the Community Safety Unit in the Scottish Government to look at evaluation of the impact of the CSU model on community safety. The evaluation model that is emerging from that work will help management and staff to look more critically at their work. This will help to evaluate the impact on and of the partnership.

What happens next?

The CSU is constantly evolving. By capturing good practice, having a robust evaluation tool and putting sound governance at the forefront of every process, it will develop further.

To supplement key areas of business, a new Hate Crime Strategy is being written. As a partnership strategy, it will enhance not only the approach to investigation and prosecution. It will ensure that there is a victim focus with clear links to strategic and national objectives through the SOA targets.

Community Payback Orders. Through identification of rundown areas by partnership staff and the community, the CSU can task out daily to Operational Services and Criminal Justice Teams. Where appropriate, individuals on the orders can be utilised to put something back into the community.

Full use of the CSU action plans to constantly maintain a critical overview of practices and procedures will help shape the future of the unit.