

Houghton Kepier School

SUMMARY

Houghton-Le-Spring is a former mining town in the city of Sunderland and lies mid way between Sunderland and Durham.

Houghton Kepier Comprehensive School delivers education to almost 1400 pupils from the local area.

The school is situated in close proximity to Houghton Town Centre. Newbottle Street is the main focus for local shopping. The school is directly opposite the local park, Rectory Park.

Nature of problem

Incidents of anti-social behaviour by the pupils at this school reached an unacceptable level including littering, criminal damage to public transport and drug taking, namely cannabis.

Defining the Problem

- Lunchtimes 1230 – 1330hrs a large number of pupils descended upon Newbottle Street to purchase lunch. The sheer number of pupils intimidated local people. Littering was also a major issue.
- Evenings 1530 – 1550hrs again pupils leave the school and several hundred head to one particular location to await local transport. A spate of criminal damage to the buses occurred.
- During lunchtime and home time periods Rectory Park was being used by the pupils to take controlled drugs.

Response

- Operation Finch – a covert police operation to tackle drug dealing.
- High Visibility patrols
- Proactive and reactive policing in partnership
- Environmental improvements

Impact of Response

Incidents of juvenile disorder reduced dramatically – 95 recorded incidents over a three-month period reduced to 23 over a similar period.

The local community are reassured and the partnership approach continues to sustain the results.

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Details of Analysis

Several meetings/brainstorming sessions took place with other agencies to identify the problems caused as a result of having a large secondary school in our area of geographical responsibility.

Houghton Kepier School has a pupil population of 1379.

Problems were identified when the pupils left the school over the lunchtime period and at the end of the school day.

The partners involved were Northumbria Police (Houghton North Community Team), Local Authority, Houghton Kepier School and Wear buses as well as local shopkeepers who contributed greatly to the success of dealing with this problem.

Between 1230 and 1330 hrs a large amount of pupils descended upon Newbottle Street to purchase lunch. No crimes were being committed as such although the sheer number of pupils in the area intimidated members of the public. This brought the associated perceived disorder. Littering was the main issue; crimes such as shoplifting were few and far between.

Between 1530 and 1550 hrs all pupils left the school and several hundred headed towards a particular area to wait for public transport. A spate of criminal damage occurred on the buses themselves.

Between the above times the area of Rectory Park was also identified as a problem area, where pupils would congregate to take controlled drugs, namely cannabis.

It was agreed that quality of life needed to be improved for local residents and shoppers. Youth disorder and the associated offences needed to be reduced. This could only be achieved by a robust partnership approach where all agencies were clearly aware of their role and how their actions would achieve the desired aims.

Response

Operation Finch ran during the middle of 2002. Covert observations were carried out to target drug dealing in Rectory Park.

High Visibility Patrols were conducted at key times this both acted as a deterrent to pupils and also gave reassurance to the public.

Working in close partnership with the school, operations utilising a drug dog resulted in one arrest for possession of cannabis.

A site visit was held involving the local Community Beat Manager, Casualty reduction officer, the local councillor and the local authority Highways Department. A discussion took place regarding the creation a new bus stop nearer to the school site, which would reduce the number of pupils congregating in one particular place for transport. Proposals were put forward to Sunderland City Council. Consideration was also given to sighting a bus stop within the grounds of the school however; this was rejected due to Health and Safety constraints.

The Community Beat Manager, Head Teacher of the school and the General Manager of Wear buses worked together and agreed that buses would be utilised on the school route that were equipped with CCTV. The head teacher agreed that any pupils caught on camera causing damage would be identified with the schools help and internal action taken against the pupil, in addition to any police action.

Consideration was also given to school staff monitoring the pupils after school. However, due to constraints of working practices agreed with teaching unions, this was not possible.

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A Shop Watch scheme had previously been introduced however, this was not working effectively. The Community Beat Manager and local shopkeeper met and the whole system was revitalised. This created a direct link between the shops and the police station. Officers could attend quickly to deal with incidents or monitor when large groups were congregating.

Results

Following high profile patrols at peak times, beat managers reinforced their presence and took action against youths who behaved in an anti-social manner. Disorder letters were sent to pupils and their parents outlining the nature and consequence of their behaviour.

Local businesses, shop workers, residents and members of the public were reassured by visits from the beat managers.

Rectory Park has received further attention from the Parks Department. They cropped vegetation, which formerly loaned itself to a gathering point for pupils during peak times of disorder. The authority gave further consideration to blocking off a walkway in the park, which is isolated and had been another haven for smoking and minor graffiti.

Following the introduction of CCTV on the transport used by school pupils, there was a dramatic reduction in incidents reported by bus drivers and passengers.

The local community represented by the local councillors were instrumental in liaising with the school, local authority and Wear Buses.

The work of the Community Beat Managers and their partners was published in the local newspaper.

Conclusion

Problems, which did exist, have now been resolved. Disorder has been reduced and almost disappeared.

Strong links remain between Houghton Kepier School, Local businesses and the Houghton Community Team.

An excellent example of partnership working to overcome a problem, which may well, be encountered in any area of any town or city.