

Police rethink early help role

A new early intervention charter is helping police forces identify and support families in need sooner

SOCIAL CARE

By Jess Brown

Last September, the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) established the Early Intervention Academy for Police Leaders that brought representatives from 20 out of the 43 forces in England together to develop and share best practice in early help policing.

The academy, supported by the Home Office, College of Policing and Police Superintendents Association for England and Wales, has now produced a Charter for Early Intervention that pulls together ideas put forward by academy members on how forces can offer early intervention to children and families before problems escalate.

The core principle underpinning the charter is how forces should be working with children's services and other partner agencies to understand the issues behind offending, so that interventions can be put in place sooner.

Recommendations

It recommends police forces work with statutory services and third sector organisations to improve data sharing and collaborate on identifying young people and families with problems that could lead to offending.

It encourages police to pool their budgets with other agencies where this could be beneficial, to hold staff to account for their delivery of early intervention, and promote a culture of empathy and compassion focused on people's strengths and potential.

The charter also suggests sharing the recruitment, training and supervision costs of local volunteers in early intervention – as well as sharing best practice with the EIF and other forces.

Based on this guidance, the academy's police leaders have



The academy has helped Norfolk Police identify and support families at risk

developed changes to implement in their individual forces.

Donna Molloy, director of dissemination at the EIF, calls the charter a “very important starting point” that pins down exactly what early intervention in policing means.

“There’s been fundamental debate on what policing is for,” she says. “The demand on the police is changing. It’s less about traditional crime and more about vulnerability, troubled families and complexity of need in local communities. Much of what they’re called out to do is something that requires early intervention approaches.

“What became apparent early on is that this isn’t just about policing, it’s another route into the wider partnership conversation in a local area.”

Each of the 20 representatives now have a plan for their local forces. Molloy says some focus on specific issues, such as domestic violence, whereas others are looking to remodel the whole system or change how they share data (see case study).

“A lot depends on how far that particular police force thought about this agenda prior to joining the college,” Molloy says.

“We have areas like the West Midlands and Greater Manchester who are taking things forward like workforce development and working in a multi-agency way for a number of years now. This just helped them go a bit further.”

New approaches

Molloy says the main benefits to come out of the academy's work have been the importance of understanding the issues behind crimes and call-outs – such as children going missing, child protection, domestic violence and child sexual abuse – and modelling new approaches to tackle these with partner agencies.

The charter also emphasises the need for workforce development, with officers being equipped to go into a home and work out the key issues that need addressing, and building relationships with families.

“The initial commitment to the Home Office has finished, but we feel quite committed to the cohort to support them and implement their ideas,” says Molloy. “This is a great opportunity to test some of these new ideas and create that evidence base for the future.”

NORFOLK IDENTIFIES FUTURE RISKS

Julie Wvndth, detective superintendent for Norfolk Police's safeguarding and harm reduction department, says Norfolk was “fairly advanced” with its early intervention efforts before taking part in the Early Intervention Academy for Police Leaders. “The local authority had an early help offer, which existed prior to the academy, that sees the formulation of early help hubs within the county's district council areas,” she says.

The hubs consist of a number of agencies and services, offering a range of support for children and families, which helps the sharing of data and information. “It's about trying to get access to other agencies such as local charities, victim support, mental health, some form of health representation, the Department for Work and Pensions, and drug and alcohol services,” Wvndth says.

The police were involved in the hubs, but their role was not clearly defined – the academy has enabled Wvndth to work out Norfolk's response to early intervention. This has included recognising that the police can identify those who pose a future safeguarding risk and start the process of getting them help.

She illustrates this with an example: “A young couple, both from unstable homes and surrounded by sexual or domestic abuse, have a child. The likelihood is there will be some need to support that child in the future. If we know that, we can get in early, and educate them about parenting and healthy relationships, so all the mechanisms are put in place early to support the unborn child.”

In addition to clarifying Norfolk Police's role in early intervention, Wvndth says the academy has helped refine it nationally. She says: “A lot of what families need in respect of early intervention is not something police can deliver in isolation. While we may not be able to offer the intervention required, we can still own a caseload and co-ordinate a response for the family.”