

Report to: Sefton Safer Communities Partnership

Date of Meeting: 9th December 2021

Report of: Superintendent Graeme Robson

Organisation: Merseyside Police

Title: Youth ASB

Introduction

The Covid-19 Pandemic has clearly had a significant impact on our young people, many of whom were growing up in an extremely challenging environment long before Covid. Our young people have been subject to significant disruption in schools, extended periods of lockdowns and other restrictions, reduced opportunities to socialise and develop skills and experiences in preparation for adulthood and in some cases, less contact with professionals from a range of agencies and sectors who are often the people who pick up on signs that something isn't right. The impact of the pandemic may not be fully understood for years to come, but it has influenced youth ASB both in the short term and with signs of longer term behavioural changes.

Experiences of Youth ASB

- Lockdowns and travel restrictions are believed to have influenced large numbers of young people to travel to Sefton, or travel within Sefton, to coastal areas in particular. Whilst the majority behaved responsibly, it did lead to increases in ASB in such areas with gatherings for "raves", alcohol and drug use and some incidents of violent crime all present during the summer months and criminal damage / firework offences through the autumn / Halloween period
- Some of this behaviour was encouraged / influenced by some high profile social media figures who were arranging raves and gatherings at Formby beach in particular
- Despite many aspects of life returning to normal, young people are still travelling into Sefton to socialise and the feeling of officers on the ground is that it's higher than "normal" years and a legacy from 2020
- The Halloween period of 2020 was noticeably busier for the force than this year, with calls and crimes / incidents markedly reduced. 2020's "Operation Banger" period came straight after some extended lockdown periods which may have influenced the behaviour of some young people

Interventions

- Our Safer Schools Officers were recruited in January 2021 and are embedded in secondary schools across Sefton. They are linked into operational police briefings and regularly work with young people and parents / schools to address issues around crime and ASB as well as taking part in diversionary activity (such as summer camps) and inputs to schools around different topics

- We have continued the Police and Youth Encouragement Scheme (PAYES) which has run for a number of years and provides young people with opportunities to go on trips camping / walking with police officers
- We have continued to use Dispersal Powers to deal with areas affected by ASB. These are carefully used, authorised only where there is a strong case to justify and based upon data and intelligence that helps to define the boundaries. The officers are briefed around the approach that should be taken – proportionate use of the powers, diversion and engagement being the priority and enforcement as a last resort
- Sefton Council attend our weekly operational briefing so they are sighted on current crime and ASB trends so this can be fed into the council's youth services
- We deploy test-purchase tactics to tackle knife, firework and alcohol sales in partnership with the local authority
- We coordinate funding from the Proceeds of Crime Act, Home Office funding (Serious Violence, County Lines etc) and other sources to local youth providers

Barriers to Success

- The lack of alternative activities for young people – not just a Sefton issue - young people were travelling in from all over Merseyside, with large numbers using the train network
- The high concentration of care homes within the Sefton area, particularly around Southport. This results in particularly vulnerable young people being placed into Southport – often far from home – mixing with young people with similar vulnerabilities. We have seen signs of quick integration with local at-risk young people and crime / ASB as a result – clearly none of this having a positive impact on the young people placed here
- Relationships between the police and young people have been tested during the pandemic as we enforced Covid restrictions, often in situations where there was no criminal or anti-social behaviour, but we had a responsibility to take action. This will take time to rebuild with some of our young people and adults

Graeme Robson
Superintendent
Merseyside Police