

Operation Yellow Card – prevention of anti-social behaviour at football fixtures

Using a prevention activity to reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB) and violence by youths at or associated with Peterborough United football fixtures.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Evaluated locally
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Anti-social behaviour Public order offences
Organisation	Cambridgeshire Constabulary
Contact	Sam Tucker
Email address	sam.tucker@cambs.police.uk
Region	Eastern
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	August 2022
Scale of initiative	Local

Aim

The objective of Operation Yellow Card is to reduce youth related ASB and violence at Peterborough United football fixtures.

Youths are identified as being responsible for a significant proportion of incidents associated with football fixtures, occurring within the town or city of the event, the football ground itself or on local public transport. Operation Yellow Card aims to address the individual behaviour of youths with a preventative approach.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of Operation yellow card are to:

- work in partnership with Peterborough United to safeguard children in attendance at home and away fixtures and increase safety
- disrupt and discourage children from committing anti-social and criminal activity at, or in connection with, Peterborough United fixtures
- prevent children from becoming involved in or associated with entrenched risk-based supporter activity
- increase the number of partnership referrals for ongoing community safeguarding.

Description

A yellow card, as within the sport, is designed to be a caution to an individual regarding their behaviour linked with football fixtures. The scheme is targeted toward 15–25-year-olds. It alerts the individual, and often their appropriate adults, of the need to make changes to their behaviour. Additionally, to identify those associated with behaviour that can lead to criminal prosecution and/or football banning orders and intervene prior to offences occurring.

Operational Football Officers (OFO), who were introduced as part of the national guidance, are best placed to identify persons of interest, through their ability to monitor behaviour at home and away football fixtures of identified individuals of risk. They are also able to identify those on the periphery who may become involved in such behaviours over time.

In partnership with Peterborough United, individuals are identified that are considered suitable for this operation. The dedicated OFO and Peterborough United safety officer agree bespoke approaches to address individuals' behaviour. The joint approach allows for a greater range of

reparation. Individuals within the relevant age range (15–25-year-olds) who are suitable for intervention activity are approached and given a bespoke requirement based on the circumstances of their behaviour.

Previous examples of responses to behaviour include:

- an enforced ban from attending the ground or banned from the ground unaccompanied by an appropriate adult (14-year-olds and above are not required to be accompanied by an adult ordinarily as part of the club's entry policy)
- requiring the individual to sit within a specific area of the ground
- hold a meeting with a representative of the Peterborough United to discuss behaviour and provide educational inputs around topics such as the legislation requirements for pyrotechnics within football grounds

Utilising these reparations in partnership with Peterborough United has been key to the success of this scheme. Noting that there are often multiple factors that lead an individual to be involved in this activity, a range of suitable and proportionate responses are required.

Peterborough United can also educate individuals on the impact that their behaviour is having on the club itself, such as financially. There is also the opportunity to educate individuals on legal implications of their behaviour that can sometimes be glorified on social media and in the film industry. An example of this would be the possession of a pyrotechnics within a football ground, which can be common at football fixtures. There have been occasions where Premier League football players have picked up a flare and waved in celebration during a televised match. There are financial penalties for football clubs when flares are ignited within the grounds. This summary demonstrates the potential conflicting messages that youths may not be aware of in relation to one specific offence, and this scheme seeks to rectify this through education.

Operation Yellow Card utilises community protection warning and notice legislation. The use of this legislation provides a gradient approach to address behaviour. This legislation allows for a bespoke range of requirements to be utilised to impact behaviour at or linked with football fixtures. All tasks and actions are recorded and there is an escalation capability, from warning, to notice, to arrest and prosecution.

The legislation cannot be used for persons under the age of 16 years of age. Therefore, alternative preventative legislation is available for those under 16 with civil injunctions, criminal behaviour orders and football banning orders. A clearly documented tiered approach can also demonstrate justification for a football banning order, where attempts at diversion prove negative and there is a need for a more substantial intervention. This shows that the police and partners are aiming to minimise criminalisation of youths, as well as take a proportionate method of impacting behaviour.

The scheme has not required additional staffing to be employed. The scheme is managed by the dedicated football officer within the constabulary. The dedicated football officer (DFO) is in regular contact with safeguarding teams and the stadium safety officer at the football club. The DFO facilitates the sessions with individuals, which are joint with representatives from the football club and in some cases safer schools' officers.

Evaluation

The evaluation is complete and was led by Cambridgeshire Constabulary.

Throughout the evaluation process the following was monitored:

- Number of youth 'risk' supporter number levels that attend fixtures (this figure can vary through various factors)
- Reoffending rate of persons subject to interventions as part of the scheme.

Reoffending rates

In the last two football seasons (2021/22 and 2022-23 seasons) 14 'yellow card' interventions (non-community protection warning) were implemented. This resulted in a 0% reoffending rate.

Community Protection Warning (CPW)/Community Protection Notice (CPN) intervention:

- 2021-22 season – four community protection warnings issued. One has progressed through to community protection notice.
- 2022-23 season – 16 people have been issued community protection warnings. Five which have progressed to a community protection notice. One individual has been arrested and is currently under investigation for a breach of community protection notice.

In the last two seasons of the 34 youths that have received an intervention, there were six occasions where there was a breach of the conditions and a requirement for escalation. A 17.6% reoffending rate was recorded in the last two seasons. The assessment has identified opportunities for further youth group engagements and partnerships with educational institutions.

Qualitative returns and anecdotal data

Individuals were identified by OFO as their names were continually mentioned. Following meetings with Peterborough United, they were invited into the club to speak with the safety officer, so that he could explain the club's position regarding problematic fans.

Two people who responded very well to this course of action were relocated in the ground by the club, so they were not causing problems in their usual seats. Part of their CPW conditions were to interact with OFOs on match days. Both individuals abided by their conditions which made a significant impact on certain youth groups.

On issuing one of the CPWs a father said, "what a fantastic scheme, I used to follow Tottenham Hotspur and was involved in lots of disorder – why wasn't this around then".

Cost analysis

- For the under 16s, nine youths have received educational interventions. All nine did not go on to cause any further anti-social behaviour or criminal offences. Based on this, the DFO believes that a minimum 3 hours per youth was saved through this intervention.
- For over 16s, a total of 24 individuals have had some form of intervention. 16 of these were issued CPWs and went on to cause no further issues. 8 breached the CPWs and were issued a CPN and caused no further issues.

The DFO, believed that without this intervention, roughly twenty of these nominals would have escalated into committing offences at football matches and would therefore have been through the custody route. Within Cambridgeshire Constabulary an average offender is in custody for 13.5 hours and has an officer committed for this time.

There are other factors that have not been included, such as if a suspect is charged with a football related offence, Cambridgeshire Police would apply for a Football Banning Order. The time has not been factored into this analysis but would add a substantial amount of time and cost. Similarly, the perception of Peterborough as a location can be tarnished by football ASB and violence, potentially

detering visitors, and tourism. However, by reducing ASB and violence, this could have a positive effect on the popularity of the area.

Overall impact

The scheme is demonstrating a positive impact, with an identified cohort of individuals who are not reoffending in ASB and violence. The lack of reoffending and progression through the gradient approach shows youths are being diverted from criminality and their behaviour has been positively impacted as a result of this approach.

Learning

- The main learning has been the collation of specific data as measurables against this issue from the outset. Ensuring that we are capturing youth data specifically as a separate field for football fixtures such as the youth 'risk' numbers.
- Clear evidence collation and capture is required to demonstrate breaches or progression from community protection warning to notices.
- The partnership working with the football club has been a significant contributory factor to the impact of this intervention.