



# **EVALUATION OF NEW ROADS' IMPACT ON THE POLICE SERVICE**

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## WHY IS THIS STUDY IMPORTANT?

Relationship-based practice is essential for safeguarding children and young people. The Department for Education (DfE, 2018) has recommended greater understanding by police officers of trauma, exploitation and criminalisation; enhanced use of relationship-based and restorative approaches; and more effective inter-agency collaboration.

Young people's perceptions of police are critical to effective police interventions because trust is central to young people's concerns. Policy on youth disaffection, public spaces and police surveillance, pose increased challenges for encounters with some young people (e.g. through 'stop and search') which in turn influences young people's attitudes. This particularly impacts on young men, especially young black men, and young people with invisible disabilities. Encounters with police officers may result in seeing victims as perpetrators, the 'harmed' as 'harming', resulting in issues of visibility. Such loopholes in attitudes and encounters are exploited by criminal gangs.

Failing to recognise young people's complexities increases the costs of keeping young people safe - eg police work to locate missing young people - and increases opportunities for criminality. Relationship-building is key, both with young people and between agencies. Improving outcomes for young people means seeing every intervention as important, being consistent and timely, and understanding what may lie behind their behaviour. It is suggested that reporting has to consider vulnerability - eg what prompts risky behaviour - and not just criminality (CYPSA, 2021). Research suggests that police need to get involved earlier; build relationships with young people; and improve collaboration, communication and information sharing between agencies. The Norfolk

based 'New Roads' service is one of the projects set up to address these concerns (others include North Yorkshire's No Wrong Door) but as yet there has been little exploration of the impact on police forces of these projects.

## AIMS OF THE EVALUATION

The aims of the evaluation were to:

- Analyse available police data involving young people from New Roads.
- Identity the impact of the New Roads project on the Police Service in terms of intelligence and improved relationship with young people.
- Explore perceptions of the police and their experiences of the criminal justice system (both as victims and as offenders) by young people involved in New Roads.
- Articulate the impact on Norfolk Constabulary key performance metrics, and the cost avoidance New Roads has generated.
- Capture professionals' views of information-sharing and multi-agency working with the Police Service, including impacts on decision-making, culture and practice.

## METHODS

The study used a mixed methods approach, which included quantitative analysis of Police and Children's Services data, qualitative interviews with young people who had used the New Roads service and their parents and carers, police staff and officers, as well as two focus groups.

- The quantitative analysis of Police and Children's Services data covered the period from June 2021, when the service began, until November 2022 when data was shared with the evaluation team. Quantitative analysis involved descriptive analysis

and interrupted time series analysis.

- The qualitative strand of the evaluation involved interviews with young people and their parents/carers as well as interviews and focus groups with professionals. One focus group included professional Children's Services staff, including staff in the New Roads Hubs, and the other included uniformed and specialist officers, and Police staff. In all, the evaluation team spoke with five young people who had used New Roads, 3 parents/carers, and 19 professionals from the Police Service and/or New Roads.

## KEY FINDINGS

### 1. What does available Police and Children's Services data tell us about young people and their time in New Roads?

- New Roads predominantly operated as an outreach service for White British, older adolescents at the edge of care.
- The majority of young people had previous contact with the police as either a suspect, a victim or a missing young person. Most commonly, young people in New Roads had appeared within Police data in all three ways.
- There were differences between the Norwich and Dereham sites within New Roads. The most significant difference was time, with young people in Dereham staying with New Roads longer.
- Police liaison officers worked with a substantial minority (76) of young people in New Roads, with these young people displaying a greater number of vulnerabilities than other young people in New Roads within care, education and criminal justice.
- Police liaison officers spent a majority of their time working with 'outliers', a group of 18 young people who were responsible for most of the missing, suspect and victims entries within Police data. These young people were more likely to be male, to be looked after, to be at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation, to be using class B drugs, and to be in alternative educational provision or NEET. They were also the young people who had been most frequently charged with criminal offences.

### 2. What has been the impact of New Roads on the Police Service in terms of intelligence and improved relationships with young people? What are young people's experiences (both as victims and as offenders) with the Police and criminal justice system?

- Police intelligence about young people increased substantially through New Roads and had positive impacts on locating and working with missing young people, influenced the way the Police Service approached young people, and aided Police Service decision-making on a more strategic level.
- The police liaison officers became a trusted professional for young people. The relationship with the police liaison officer led to improved contact with other police officers for young people and their families.
- Since their involvement in New Roads, young people could increasingly name approachable police officers whom they felt understood them.
- Young people reported experiences of bullying as the most pressing form of victimisation in their lives. School was not experienced as a safe place and bullying disrupted educational pathways.

### 3. What has been the impact of New Roads on Constabulary key performance metrics, and what cost avoidance has the Constabulary had through New Roads?

- Criminal charges and missing episodes both reduced in number for the young people who were supported by New Roads.
- Overall, missing episodes and charges decreased during New Roads, resulting in cost savings for the Norfolk Constabulary in the region of £325,592.

### 4. What were professionals' views of information-sharing and multi-agency working with the Police Service, including impacts on decision-making, culture and practice?

- Police officers and staff linked to New Roads had a strong awareness of young people's underlying vulnerabilities and complex identities.
- New Roads helped develop joint-working between

professionals in relation to young people at risk.

- Police Service professional standards were exemplified within New Roads through sharing intelligence and shared understanding of trauma-related behaviours (COP, 2014). This has led to clearer accountability and speedier responses.
- There were examples of New Roads' staff and Police Service staff supporting each other's roles and purposes through trust and relationship-building.
- At the centre of the operational work the police liaison officer based in the Hubs proved to be an essential ingredient, assisting information-sharing, contributing to better understanding within families and by young people, and assisting Police Service professional development.
- Although outreach work has been successful, the Police Service reported that Hubs themselves have been hampered by managing a few cases which have limited the Hubs' flexibility.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation makes the following recommendations based on quantitative and qualitative data.

Police liaison officers worked with 39 per cent of young people within New Roads, with the majority of their time focused on 18 'outlier' young people. Young people consistently raised a great concern about bullying and a lack of professional support with this issue. These findings suggest police work within New Roads may be more reactive rather than preventative. There may be scope to increase the impact of their work and in more preventative ways such as police liaison officers expanding their work to young people seen through outreach and more work with bullied young people.

The evaluation identified a small group of young people with high needs within New Roads whose emergency placements significantly impacted the service and other young people's ability to access the support they needed. These placement decisions, not being made in partnership with the police or New Roads staff, led police to believe New Roads was not functioning as it was designed to. This situation has the potential to erode good quality working relationships

and trust between the agencies involved.

The New Roads service should have more input into decision-making on which young people are appropriate for the service, so that the hubs are not inappropriately used for emergency accommodation. In addition police work with 'outlier' young people should be more specifically tailored to their individual needs, taking into consideration their mental health need and potentially undiagnosed neurodevelopmental disabilities in order to disrupt their negative pathways.

Data suggests a continuing and enhanced role for police liaison officers in the professional development of both Children's Services staff and police officers and staff. Police officers valued the consistent link police liaison officers provided between police officers and Children's Services staff. Evidence indicates they are an important source of intelligence for both outreach staff and police officers.

Police liaison officers' role might, for example, be expanded to include involvement in the briefing of new beat officers on approaches to young people that help keep them safe and sharing knowledge of factors that contribute to young people's behaviour and going missing.

Quantitative findings identified differences between the service sites, the most significant being that young people in Dereham remained with New Roads for a longer period of time. A longer time period may offer greater opportunities for persistence and perseverance, contributing to better outcomes for young people (JTAI, Ofsted, 2018). Differences in approach between police liaison officers in Norwich and Dereham, i.e. broader, but less intensive versus working more intensively with fewer young people, may also account for these differences in outcomes.

It would be beneficial for New Roads to examine the reasons for the differences identified between the Norwich and Dereham sites in terms of time young people spend there.

There was strong awareness of the importance of education among police and New Roads staff. Despite

good efforts to get young people into educational provision, some 28 per cent of New Roads young people are either not in education or training (NEET) or in alternative provision. Some of these young people are likely to have experienced bullying or undiagnosed special educational needs as part of their barriers to engaging with education. Young people also had very little careers' awareness or clarity over their future intentions.

Including an educational liaison officer within New Roads to work on young people's aspirations, educational requirements and careers guidance would be of benefit.

New Roads working alongside the police with young people being bullied within educational settings is also likely to help improve outcomes.

## STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS EVALUATION

The evaluation had a number of strengths and limitations. Using variables from Children's Services and the Police produced robust and detailed findings about young people's characteristics across systems, and in particular identified 'outliers' as a group of concern. Considering victimisation data held by the police alongside missing and suspect data showed the importance of keeping young people's complexity in mind. Finally, the use of interrupted time series allowed for causality to be attributed to New Roads. This allowed us to isolate all other characteristics and focus on the positive effect New Roads had on outcomes related to a reduction in missing episodes and criminal charges.

In terms of limitations, young people's SDQ scores were unavailable; supplementing young people's characteristics with their SDQ scores would add

further and critical information about young people's needs. There were also issues regarding the sample size of young people interviewed. It would have been particularly productive to hear the experiences of young people who were 'outliers' as well as more young people supported by police liaison officers. However, the results are not intended to be generalisable but illustrative and indicative. Finally, quasi-experimental analysis always relies on assumptions that are not necessarily easily verified. Other quasi-experimental designs could corroborate the findings in this evaluation, although other counterfactual data would be needed to develop those models.

### HOW TO CITE THIS RESEARCH BRIEFING

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