



TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE

Thursday, 23 January 2025

REPORT TITLE:	COMMUNITY SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT
REPORT OF:	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: NEIGHBOURHOODS, SAFETY & TRANSPORT

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides an update on key activity in relation to one of the ten thematic areas of Wirral Community Safety Strategy (2021-2026) - Anti-Social Behaviour.

The work undertaken to improve community safety supports the Council Plan: Wirral Working Together 2023-27, specifically Theme 2 Early Help for Children & Families, Theme 4 Promoting Independence & Healthier Lives, Theme 5 Protecting our Environment and Theme 6 Creating safe, resilient and engaged communities.

This matter affects all Wards within the Borough.

This is not a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION

The Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee is requested to note the content of the report and highlight any areas requiring further clarification or action.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 To ensure that Members of the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee have the opportunity to monitor the performance of the Council and partners in relation to community safety.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 This report has been developed in line with a request from Members of this Committee. No other options have been considered.

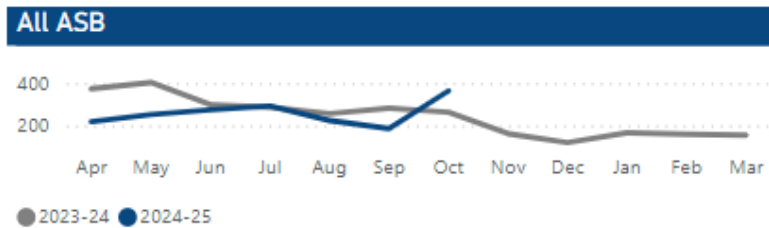
3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 It is a statutory responsibility under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 for Councils to lead on the production of a coherent Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy (Community Safety Strategy). Wirral's Community Safety Strategy (2021-26) was endorsed by full Council on 6 September 2021, minute 29 refers. This sets out ten thematic areas for focused activity. Activity supports a number of priority areas within the Council Plan: Wirral Working Together 2023-27
- 3.2 The Assistant Director of Neighbourhoods, Safety and Transport was requested to provide regular updates to Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee on progress made in respect to the delivery of the Community Safety Strategy (27 July 2021, minute 18 refers). Periodic performance reports in relation to Community Safety have been reported to this Committee, utilising data captured in the Safer Wirral Tracker; an award-winning interactive Power BI report created by Wirral Intelligence Service. This report does not seek to replicate that information, but to provide a more in-depth update on key activity in relation to one thematic area: Anti-Social Behaviour.

4.0 TACKLING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

- 4.1 The number of incidents of anti-social behaviour (ASB) reported to Merseyside Police over the period of 1st April - 31st October 2024 can be seen in Table 1 below. The trends seen this year have been lower or the same as the levels of ASB for 2023/24, with the exception of October 2024. For October 2024, there were 364 incidents reported to police, compared to 263 for October 2023. The peak day for incidents of ASB was Saturday, with the peak time being between 6pm and 9pm. Over the reporting period there were 1,809 incidents of ASB, with 857 involving youths and 952 involving adults.

Table 1: Incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour (1 April 2024 – 31 October 2024):



- 4.2 The Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Team, which is co-located across both Local Policing areas, works closely with Merseyside Police and other partners to identify and target perpetrators of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and offenders and utilise the tools and powers available.
- 4.3 Partnership tactical activity is primarily co-ordinated through a weekly Threat, Harm, Risk meeting, chaired by the Chief Inspector for Local Policing. This meeting reviews Force tactical threats, serious organised crime activity, threat management, neighbourhood crime, offender management and forthcoming prison releases, anti-social behaviour (ASB), upcoming events and agrees deployments and focus priorities for the coming week. A bi-weekly borough-wide Problem-Solving Meeting, led by the Anti-Social Behaviour Team, co-ordinates multi-agency activity to tackle emerging locational issues. Hot spot or repeat locations are the focus of dedicated and short-term Problem Solving Groups, chaired by the ASB Team or Police, co-ordinating a range of preventative, diversionary and enforcement activity to reduce incidents and provide community reassurance.
- 4.4 Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) have been implemented by the Council to deal with persistent ASB in specific locations; there are four current PSPOs in [Woodchurch \(2022\)](#), [Bromborough industrial estate \(2022\)](#), [Alabama Way car park \(2024\)](#), and a new PSPO for [West Kirby \(2024\)](#). These Orders prohibit anti-social behaviours impacting the local community, the penalty for breach of which (by over 18s) is by way of Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN). Referrals and engagement with parents/carers is undertaken with those under 18 years of age. Due to an increasing issue with groups of young people wearing face coverings, including balaclavas, to avoid identification; the West Kirby PSPO includes prohibitions related to face coverings, as set out in the earlier Woodchurch PSPO.
- 4.5 **Activity to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB)**
- 4.6 There is a wide range and breadth of activity across the borough and across sectors to tackle ASB. Key elements of the Council's contribution have been highlighted below.
- 4.7 **Operation Openspace**
- 4.8 The annual Operation Openspace, led by Merseyside Police, operated over the summer months to help ensure that Wirral's open spaces, beaches and parks were safe and enjoyable to visitors. Working with the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour

Team, Detached Youth Work teams and Parks & Countryside teams, Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, HM Coastguard Wirral, British Transport Police and other services and partners, activity was focused upon key hot spots, with an uplift in police resources on Friday and Saturday nights over a three-month period. This activity was part-funded by Wirral Community Safety Partnership through the Merseyside Police & Crime Commissioner's Community Safety Grant.

4.9 Activity was focused upon New Brighton, West Kirby and parks in the East of Wirral. Attention was also given to Central Park, Liscard town centre and Birkenhead town centre. Key dates were also targeted including exam and term closures in schools and larger scale events. Police data for 7/6/24-7/9/24 shows a 9% decrease in crime across the borough on top of a decrease the previous year. Whilst on Operation Openspace patrols, officers made significant arrests of suspects relating to serious acquisitive crime. Calls relating to ASB reduced across all areas save those relating to New Ferry, Bromborough and Eastham primarily, which is linked to issues identified further below related to youth violence (4.30).

4.10 **Operation Staysafe**

4.11 Aligned to and co-ordinated with Operation Openspace, Operation Staysafe focuses upon patrolling hot-spot locations to protect unsupervised and vulnerable children and young people and to reassure the public that issues of concern are being dealt with. The Operation identifies young people who are out late at night, or at risk of becoming a victim of crime, being drawn into criminal behaviour and/or being exploited and takes them to a place of safety. They are then returned to their parents/carers and follow up actions may then be put in place to stop problem behaviour from recurring, from safeguarding to enforcement action, as appropriate. Partners to the Council and Merseyside Police supporting these operations have included British Transport Police, HM Coastguard, Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, Merseyrail, St. John Ambulance, RNLI and Registered Providers of social housing. This activity is being part-funded by Wirral Community Safety Partnership through the Merseyside Police & Crime Commissioner's Community Safety Grant.

4.12 Eight Operation Staysafes have taken place since 1 April 2024, in West Kirby, New Brighton, Birkenhead, Bromborough, Leasowe and Woodchurch. There were a total of 13 stop checks/searches by the police, 121 Non-Payment of Fare Penalty Notices issued, alcohol and drug seizures and 6 young people returned to the place of safety. Following the activity, 19 warning letters were sent by the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Team and 3 Formal Warnings issued. On 24 May 2024, a key school date and celebratory gathering at Cubbins Green, West Kirby (which in 2023 resulted in a 15-year-old male being the subject of an assault involving a knife), saw over 50 young people dispersed without any reported incidents of violence. Further Staysafe Operation(s) will next take place in the Spring.

4.13 **Early Help & Prevention Co-ordination Hub**

4.14 The Council's Early Help & Prevention Service (including its Youth Justice Service) continues to lead on a multi-agency approach to prevention through an Early Help & Prevention Co-ordination Hub. The Hub receives referrals for support for young people who are at risk in the community. A variety of partners work together to identify need and the best service to support the child/young person. The activity of

the Hub is overseen through a strategic meeting chaired by the Head of Contextual Safeguarding, with the contribution of senior managers from a number of agencies and service areas who can support and drive the operational delivery.

4.15 **Turnaround Programme**

4.16 Wirral Youth Justice Service (YJS) received Home Office funding for a three-year period (2022-2025) for the Turnaround programme; to target offending behaviour and anti-social behaviour and reduce the number of first-time entrants into the criminal justice system. The aim was to improve life chances and reduce offending, violence in the community and anti-social behaviour incidents, through early identification and the offer of one-to-one support to these young people and families as well as activity-based programmes. The funding is due to end in March 2025 and at the time of drafting this report, no further notification has been received from the Ministry of Justice that the funding will continue.

4.17 Throughout the programme of Turnaround, data analysis has enabled YJS to target those young people who are most at risk of being involved with the Police. Wirral has utilised the Turnaround funding to target young people identified through Police data who are arrested for an offence but either bailed or released with 'No Further Action'. Three additional officers were appointed to run the programme with young people identified through referral to the Early Intervention & Prevention Hub, through the provision of group activities and via one-to-one interventions. To date and nearing the end of the programme, over 75 young people who were all at risk of entering the criminal justice system or involved in anti-social behaviour have been worked with and to-date none have been arrested. This is outstanding with regards to outcomes for the young people and testament to the staff and young people.

4.18 Moving into 2025/26, the Youth Justice Service will be able to fund the turnaround programme to extend the programme by twelve months, and to future proof the programme. It will look at areas where it can be continued beyond 2025/26.

4.19 **EVOLVE – Clear, Hold, Build**

4.20 The multi-agency partnership tactic was launched in May 2023 – Clear, Hold, Build – designed and part-funded by the Home Office to rescue and regenerate areas most affected by serious and organised crime. The three-phase initiative, known locally as Wirral EVOLVE, uses a combination of targeted high-visibility police operations and covert policing tactics alongside activity from partners and input from residents, to protect communities and prevent organised crime groups from operating. Activity is focused upon Beechwood, Woodchurch and Noctorum.

4.21 Merseyside Police is focused upon the 'Clear' and 'Hold' elements of the strategy. 'Clear' seeing the relentless pursuit of gang members using all available criminal, civil and regulatory powers, and tactics to clear an area, removing and impeding the Organised Crime Group's (OCG's) ability to operate. 'Hold' to prevent other OCG members capitalising on the vacuum created.

4.22 Wirral Council, through the Community Safety service, is leading on the 'Build' element of the strategy. Helping and supporting the community to become more assertive and confident and reduce permissive behaviours, tolerance to illicit goods

and services and criminal/anti-social behaviour. It is important to note that the three stages of EVOLVE are not fixed time periods and the locations are likely to 'flex' between the stages.

- 4.23 An Operational Delivery Group (ODG) oversees the activity and is chaired by the Assistant Director for Neighbourhoods, Safety & Transport. It consists of representatives from across Wirral Council, Merseyside Police, Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, Wirral Probation Service, NHS, Registered Providers of social housing and other sectors.
- 4.24 A performance dashboard has been developed in Power BI by Wirral Intelligence Service, building further upon the exemplary Safer Wirral Tracker. The dashboard collates data across the EVOLVE areas relating to crime, anti-social behaviour, population data, economic conditions, substance misuse, hospital admissions and school exclusions. These data sets may continue to be extended as the work of the ODG develops.
- 4.25 Strategic governance includes the reporting of performance outcomes to the Home Office and Merseyside Serious Organised Crime Board chaired by the Executive Director for People at Sefton Council. The EVOLVE project is part of the wider work that takes place under Priority 4 of Wirral Council's Health & Wellbeing Strategy. Priority 4 looks to create safe and healthy places for people to live that protect health and promote a good standard of living; this project sits within violence reduction, as it uses a public health approach to community engagement and focuses on strengthening communities and helping them to become more resilient.
- 4.26 The Council's activity in relation to the 'Build' element has been focused through three Problem Solving & Implementation Groups (PSI Groups); one for each area. Whilst these groups consist of community representatives and agencies, it was important that these were chaired by non-statutory service representatives to encourage engagement, whilst still being supported by a dedicated officer from the Community Safety service. Each PSI Group has a bespoke action plan to deliver improvements across a range of thematic areas and a number of early wins have already been achieved in just over a year of their operation. As well as building trust between communities and agencies, environmental improvements have been made in local areas, not least through targeted Community Action Days seeing communities supported to clear litter, waste and fly tipping from 'grot spots', which has been shown to have resulted in a maintenance/improvement in environmental standards.
- 4.27 The work of the PSI Groups were kick started by a Participatory Budgeting process with local communities. Local community based groups in Beechwood, Woodchurch and Noctorum were invited to apply for small grants of up to £2,000 from the EVOLVE Wirral fund (consisting of external funding) and had to present their bids to fellow residents and ask for their vote at one of the local events, where more than 400 people cast their votes for their preferred project. A total of 34 local projects received funding to deliver community safety activities in their communities throughout 2024. £25,000 of the fund was made possible due to the Proceeds of Crime Act, which is designed to re-direct money and assets seized from convicted criminals into community initiatives. Among the successful groups receiving funding

were schools, churches, local junior football clubs, other sports clubs, charities and local Community Interest Companies amongst others.

- 4.28 Wirral's innovative approach to the 'Build' element of EVOLVE was featured at the national Clear, Hold, Build conference hosted by the Home Office and National Police Chiefs' Council in May 2024 and the Council has facilitated a number of requested visits from Police Forces and local authorities across the country.
- 4.29 Home Office funding via Merseyside Police also funded a new public realm CCTV camera for each area. The CCTV cameras in Beechwood and Noctorum were the first on the respective estates and in Woodchurch the first with Council control. The latter was a key tool in the investigation of the road traffic collision that occurred on Hoole Road in November 2024 that tragically resulted in the death of a 17-year old and serious injury to an 18-year old.
- 4.30 Increased tensions amongst Organised Crime Groups, particularly with youth-related violence, continues to cause concern and is a priority focus of activity for agencies.
- 4.31 **Operation Banger**
- 4.32 Operation Banger is a multi-agency operation for the period including Mischief Night (30 October), Halloween (31 October) and Bonfire Night (5 November), the planning for which starts in late spring/early summer annually. Due to the increase in the number and size of unauthorised community bonfires, the Council's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) agreed to the Community Safety service piloting a different approach this year. Due to concerns related to the annual bonfires in the EVOLVE areas in particular and taking the opportunity to build upon the strengthened community relationships, engagement was undertaken with organisers in Woodchurch, Beechwood, Noctorum and Ilchester Park, Birkenhead (which is on the periphery). Advice, guidance and support was given to the organisers to make the events safer, with a small amount of grant funding to ensure key safety aspects were in place, including Public Liability Insurance, risk assessments, first aid, stewarding and fencing.
- 4.33 Overall this approach was successful in terms of public safety. On Bonfire Night in Wirral, there was a 37.5% reduction in deliberate fires, no firework incidents involving the public or firefighting crew dealt with by Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service and a 23% reduction in ASB and criminal damage reported to Merseyside Police.
- 4.34 A further report will be taken to SLT outlining a series of recommendations, which will include the proposal for an appropriate Council Committee to debate the full range of views in relation to community bonfires and adopt a clear Council policy.
- 4.35 **Anti-Social Behaviour Case Reviews ('Community Trigger')**
- 4.36 The anti-social behaviour case review (formerly known as the Community Trigger) provides victims of persistent anti-social behaviour the right to request a review of their case where the local threshold is met. If a complainant feels that the response to their complaint has been inadequate, they can request a formal review of the case. This aims to solve problems and investigate other options that may be available.

- 4.37 The Panel hearing ASB Case Reviews consists of representatives from Wirral Council, Merseyside Police & NHS (Cheshire & Merseyside). The Panel may make recommendations to anybody who exercises a public function(s), and that agency must have regard to the recommendations when exercising their public functions. If still dissatisfied, a complaint(s) may escalate their concerns to the Police & Crime Commissioner for Merseyside.
- 4.38 12 ASB Case Reviews were undertaken in the calendar years of 2020-2023 (inclusive). 4 ASB Case Reviews have been heard in 2024, with one further to be listed for hearing.
- 4.39 **Changes in legislation**
- 4.40 Two key proposed changes in legislation are outlined below.
- 4.41 New legislation (the Crime and Policing Bill) is expected to be brought forward in early 2025, which will include new powers to clamp down on anti-social behaviour. New 'Respect Orders' will give the police and local councils powers to ban persistent offenders from town centres or from drinking in public spots such as high streets and local parks, where they have caused misery to local people. These orders will be piloted prior to national rollout to make sure they are as effective as possible. Perpetrators can also be required to address the root cause of their behaviour by being mandated to undertake positive rehabilitation, such as attending drug or alcohol treatment services, or an anger management course to address the underlying causes of their behaviour. Failure to comply with Respect Orders will be a criminal offence. Police will have the ability to immediately arrest anybody who is breaching.
- 4.42 Existing legislation will also be amended to give the police stronger powers to seize vehicles involved in anti-social behaviour, with officers no longer required to issue a warning before seizing the vehicles. This will allow police to deal more swiftly with the scourge of off-road bikes in public parks and dangerous e-scooters on pavements, street racing and cruising. It will also assist the police in tackling car meets, which can see hundreds of cars gather in public spaces that often include loud aggressive engine revving and intimidating music.
- 4.43 **Anti-Social Behaviour Awareness Week (18-24 November 2024)**
- 4.44 The UK's national ASB Awareness Week, supported by HM Government, the Civil Service, all Police and Fire forces in the country, Historic England, and thousands of housing providers, local authorities and community groups, this year focused upon making communities safer.
- 4.45 Locally, activity was co-ordinated by Wirral Anti-Social Behaviour Team, with Merseyside Police. Activity across the week took place with Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, Magenta Living, Riverside Housing, British Transport Police, Involve Northwest's Community Connectors and local ward councillors. Not least, letter drops were made to 440 properties and 250 people were engaged with at street advice surgeries.

4.46 Recognition

4.47 Community Safety has been shortlisted for three national awards. A Community Engagement Award by Keep Britain Tidy (for the environmental activity in the EVOLVE areas, including as part of Operation Banger) the results of which will be announced in January 2025 and both Team of the Year (Emergency Control Centre) and Exemplary Partnership Award (Wirral Anti-Social Behaviour Team, for the Staysafe Operations referred to in 4.10 - 4.12 above) by Resolve, results to be announced in March 2025.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

7.1 There are no resource implications arising from this report.

8.0 RELEVANT RISKS

8.1 Information on the key risks faced by the Directorate and the organisation and the associated mitigations and planned actions are included in the Directorate and Corporate Risk Registers.

8.2 Funding from the Police & Crime Commissioner, through the Community Safety Grant, is unknown beyond 2026/7. The grant pays for a considerable amount of activity to tackle crime and disorder and has some staffing posts attached to it.

9.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

9.1 Neighbourhood services and partner organisations including Merseyside Police carry out a range of consultation and engagement with residents to work to optimise service delivery and outcomes for residents.

10.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

10.2 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity. There are no direct equality implications arising from this report.

11.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no environmental and climate implications generated by the recommendations in this report.
- 11.2 The content and/or recommendations contained within this report are expected to have no impact on emissions of Greenhouse Gases.

12.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The activity supports the reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour in the borough which has a range of community wealth implications. This includes increasing safety for people, protecting community assets and local businesses and the ability to tackle any inaccurate perceptions of crime in Wirral. The impact of these can lead to investment in the borough, increase footfall in businesses including retail and the night-time economy and creation of local employment opportunities.

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APPENDICES

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Crime and Policing Bill
Wirral Community Safety Strategy (2021-26)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee in accordance with section (h) regarding community safety, crime and disorder and all associated matters of its Terms of Reference.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE AND LEISURE COMMITTEE	25 July 2023
TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE AND LEISURE COMMITTEE	9 March 2023
TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE AND LEISURE COMMITTEE	1 December 2022