



## **Operation: Between the Lines**

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*Key Issue:*

Young people were causing numerous problems within a public park close to a major retail park for decades. This included congregating at the entrance to the retail premises, throwing items within the store, disrupting customers, thefts and damage caused to properties in the area. They were also involved in underage drinking, drug misuse, playing loud music and their behaviour was not only having a negative impact upon those directly affected but the wider community as they didn't feel like they could use the area or would be safe doing so.

The underlying issue to this problem was a mistrust of the Police and a general culture of lawlessness that had endured for generations, and was now accepted. There was potential for the young people to be groomed by terrorist groups in the area who actively seek to harm or kill Police officer in Northern Ireland.

## Summary

### Scanning:

An area, colloquially known as “The Lines” in Dungannon had previously been railway tracks and was subsequently re-developed into a pathway and park. Experienced officers cannot remember a time before this area became a hotspot for anti-social behavior, alcohol and drug misuse and related criminality. This area was a ‘no-go’ area for officers on foot and crowds were extremely hostile towards Police. These behaviors had passed down through generations with no improvement. Locals had resigned themselves to the fact it would never change.

We took the lead in tackling the problem in a bid to establish and address the root causes as to why this problem had developed. We spoke to all key partners, other local officers, residents, businesses and the young people themselves to gauge the full impact of the problem.

### Analysis:

Through a detailed analysis of occurrences in the area, officers identified who was involved, when and where incidents were happening. The key question was around why the young people were so hostile and mistrusting of Police. By linking in with the local partners, we established there was an absence of Youth provision in the area and the young people did not want to engage with Police. Those involved were purchasing alcohol nearby and consuming it in the area causing further issues. There had also been recent reduction of security within the retail premises.

## **Response:**

We implemented a problem-solving plan involving increased scrutiny of all incidents in the area, regular meetings with the retail store and a review of the security provision on site. Engagement with the young people and their parents was the key component that helped resolve this problem.

The problem-solving plan provided relevant and current information for all officers. The Crime Prevention Officer provided valuable situational crime prevention support and training support to the retail store and locally affected residents. Youth Service provision increased as did local Police engagement with key players at key times.

## **Assessment:**

We reviewed data and held debriefing meetings with partners. The problems have not been eradicated but have significantly reduced. All partners continue to meet on a regular basis. The designing out crime recommendations are being addressed with local authority now developing a recreation park in the area. We continually communicate the positive outcomes of this approach. Some young people, who were involved in the original incidents, have since enrolled in youth engagement programmes with local Police as one of the main partners.

## Description

### Scanning:

#### Appendix A

An area, colloquially known as “The Lines” in Dungannon, previously a railway track, closed in 1965 and was re-developed into a pathway running through Dungannon, Northern Ireland. Experienced officers cannot remember a time before this area was a hotspot for anti-social behavior, alcohol and drug misuse and criminality. These behaviors had been passed down through generations of life course persistent offenders with no improvement, and locals had resigned themselves to the fact it would never improve. This was a ‘no-go’ area for officers, particularly on foot, and officers would regularly be attacked with missiles if they got out to deal with ongoing incidents. Crowds were extremely hostile and we recognized there was a historical hatred of Police in the local area due to the complicated politics of Northern Ireland.

In 2020, the local Neighborhood Policing Team took responsibility for tackling this problem to make changes for the local community and multiple affected partners. Initially, we looked at Police systems to establish the frequency, severity and location of the main issues. We spoke to local officers who attended calls to gain detail on incidents and those involved. We spoke with local residents, partners and affected businesses to gauge the full impact this was having on them in a community that would not ordinarily have felt comfortable calling Police with problems.

We organized meetings with Tesco security, store managers and staff, learning quickly that staff were afraid to leave their cars, walk to their cars at finishing time and were unaware of their rights and responsibilities with regards to dealing with issues arising. Incidents were going unreported because of a perception that this was normal for this area and nothing could, or would be done. This meeting helped gain a key partner and a single point of contact to collate incidents and CCTV footage, together with a team of willing people who had a vested interest in helping resolve the issues.

The local businesses, bus station, shoppers and residents made reports to Police which placed a huge demand on Local Policing officers attending numerous calls, predominantly during evenings and weekends, during good weather and school holidays. This pulled resources from other calls for service. As Police presence in this area normally received an unwelcome reaction (throwing missiles and creating roadblocks), additional Police had to be tasked putting further pressure on resourcing. Speaking to officers, they were frustrated at always attending calls with seemingly no outcome except to receive a hostile response and move young people from the area. It was like Groundhog Day, call after call.

There was a general feeling within the community that although it was a central area for transit to and from the bus station, Tesco store and groups accessing the community centre, there was a loss of control, sense of fear, and people would just avoid using it. It was sad to learn just how much fear and frustration there was. In particular, we were unaware of some issues as there was underreporting! We believe this was due to the feeling the situation was irreparable, pointless and there was little confidence in policing.

## Analysis:

### Appendix B

In late 2020, Dungannon Neighbourhood Policing Team initiated a problem solving approach to address escalating criminality and anti-social behaviour. We collated all linked incidents and previous work that had been conducted to collate it in one location. This ensured all information was accessible to various Police departments, could be updated by all and avoided duplication. It could therefore be utilised as a dynamic briefing tool when Police were attending new incidents.

Initially, using the Problem Analysis Triangle to guide our analysis, we divided our attention into three main areas:

### **VICTIM/TARGET**

The victims here were numerous, including the community, local retail, the community centre, bus station and emergency services. The main victim, where most incidents were occurring, was the Tesco store. The community had lost the use of "The Lines", due to fear and intimidation.

There was a detrimental impact on Tesco who had received complaints from customers who did not feel safe when shopping there in the evenings, resulting in potential financial implications. Some staff also raised concerns, to the extent of not wanting to work the late shift during the week, as there would be no additional security in the store and they were on their own leaving the premises.

There was evidence of underage drinking including other risk taking behaviour by young people, making them vulnerable to also becoming victims of crime. We were also aware of local paramilitaries using this area as an area to recruit young people. This caused us great concern and assisted us in making a response to the problem a local priority. We knew the young people harboured negative opinions and mistrust in policing and this explained the hostile response we received when interacting with them.

All Emergency Services were impacted and sending resources to this area on a regular basis thereby affecting services to the greater community. There were occasions where colleagues, Fire Fighters, Paramedics and even local people had become the victim of attacks from the group and associates, with occasions where Police vehicles were damaged to the point of being usable.

We engaged with the victims of crimes from as far as three months previous, speaking to those who had reported incidents and collating their experiences, any further evidence, CCTV and intelligence. We asked whether they had any ideas or opinions on how to deal with the matter from those directly affected rather than just forcing Police's opinion on how to deal with it. We learned that people were much more receptive to us than we thought. The area would not have been Police friendly in the past and we still held that perception, but I think when people saw how serious we were about trying to make a positive change for them, and with them, they were receptive. We recognised we were the initial 'guardian' for the crime related issues, but we were also determined to be the catalyst for others to take ownership too.

## **OFFENDER**

All of the reports received referred to 'young people'. There were very few identities, or descriptions and the numbers in the groups varied. We had a good idea of the age group we needed to target but we were not sure how.

We linked in with local schools and spoke to them regarding some of their problem pupils or issues within year groups so we could respond appropriately. We spoke with the School Liaison Officer and Youth Diversion Officer to gain experience on issues experienced by them and tools we could use to divert young suspects of crime and also those on the verge of offending. We recognised that parents and guardians played a vital role as 'handlers' in this situation and that informal social control is worth more than any sanction we could impose.

In this community, we acknowledged the historically fractured relationship with some of the local community and the Police. We were sure this was one of the root causes we could have to tackle and we were determined not to be deterred by this.

## **LOCATION**

The area of The Lines is a pathway and adjacent park of approximately one Kilometre in length. It comprises of a long pathway with bridges overhead, businesses and is bordered by housing developments with a new modern community centre at the centre and close to a large Tesco store. The area bordering is comprised of predominantly social housing with residents of mainly Romanic Catholic religion, although over the past 10 years there had been an influx of people from East Timor, settling in these areas and working in the factories close by.

Through a detailed analysis of occurrences old and new, we established a pattern of when incidents were occurring, evenings, weekends, school holidays and during good weather! We also established it was not the entire area was an issue, rather specific locations within it.

The 'Manager' for this area was Local Council who took ownership and maintained it, but we also considered the local community who would have the interest and ability to have some control of this area.



## **PARTNERS**

We linked in with the local Police & Community Safety Partnership and Council who helped us establish why this behaviour was such a problem in this area at this time. There was little youth provision and as previously mentioned, this behaviour was generational. When I began my career in 2010, this area was misused by youths and they would at times target the community but would also lure Police into the area to attack them. As is often the case, we now found ourselves dealing with the children of the original youths from years ago. They have grown up in an environment where this is what they aspired to and it was going to be quite a challenge to break this cycle!

The group was mainly comprised of young people from a previously Republican background with others from Eastern European and East Timor backgrounds relatively new to the area. There were also one or two youths who were from a Loyalist background and to see the mix of Protestant, Catholic, local and other races in Northern Ireland's intricate politics was very encouraging, the activities they were choosing to participate in needed some work. The problem had evolved from years ago, when it was potentially political, now youths were mixing well but were causing trouble. There still was great mistrust of Police and common issues with lawfulness.

Our analysis helped us identify key partners and our Super Controllers who we needed to contribute to solving the problem

- Local Policing Teams
- Other colleagues, Dog section, Tactical support Group, District Support Team
- District Crime Prevention Officer
- Local Council enforcement
- Local Council Planning
- Local Licensees

- Retail stores and Staff
- Education Authority Youth Service
- Youth Diversion Officer and Schools' Officer
- Parents
- Dungannon Youth Resource Centre

Evidence of what was happening indicated that Police had powers to deal with the associated criminal offences. It was however clear that this on its own this would have minimal impact and we did not wish to criminalise young people, whose life course we would prefer to re-direct if possible. Other partners also had relevant roles and powers, for example local authority (On street Drinking and littering) and retail premises (barring orders), however these were not being used.

Our main barrier was identifying the youths, bystanders and families then working out from there. The basic analysis had been completed previously when others had made some attempt to problem solve, the prescription made at that time had had little effect. We wanted to learn from previous approaches and recognised this was a dynamic problem. Previous methods may or may not work but we were confident as a team we had been in the area for ten plus years and had been unknowingly conducting our research and analysis all this time. With fundamental, raw, on the ground questioning and engagement we believed our experience and craft with the combined power in partnership working could make the difference, and we considered and delivered a number of appropriate responses.

**Hypothesis 1:** Lack of available youth provision in the area meant young people had little to do and this behaviour had been passed down through generations with no striving for more.

**Hypothesis 2:** Mistrust of Police and a culture of lawlessness that was rarely being challenged.

**Hypothesis 3:** Lack of reporting of incidents and therefore no positive action taken with suspects. No action meaning no deterrent to committing further offences.

**Hypothesis 3:** Reduced Security measures in Tesco store had increased Anti-Social Behaviour in the store and surrounding areas.

### **Response:**

The Neighbourhood Officers for this ward implemented a problem solving approach recording all incidents linked to the operation and any actions taken to avoid duplication and keep everyone informed in an accessible way.

Crucially on this occasion, we benefited from consistent and relentless senior endorsement. I considered this the backbone because, without it, our responses could have been very different. Our Inspector and Sergeant were fully supportive and gave us the authority to act independently and creatively and were receptive to change!

The initial response and in our opinion the most beneficial and successful tool was Neighbourhood Policing Team officers allocated to be on the beat and in the area at the relevant times. Initially, groups ran away or threw things at us, but eventually they started to recognise our familiar faces, became curious and then started to talk to us. With a consistent presence in an engaging manner, the team got to know names and family links for the youths and were on first name terms with the majority of them, engaging in conversations about anti-social behaviour and what in their opinion could divert their attention. In conversation, skate parks and indoor facilities for them to gather in were mentioned and these discussed with local council who were planning to re-develop some of the waste ground attached to this area. We utilised our high visibility coats while on patrol on the lines as a visual dissociation from the past and subconsciously aligning with an emergency service or a traffic warden that helped them in school.

This had an excellent impact on investigations and identifying suspects from incidents reported. We could now easily identify suspects from CCTV without the need to run after them. We would take on the investigation, whether it be criminal or anti-social behaviour related. We engaged with them and their parents eventually becoming more aware of their family circumstances and pressures giving us the knowledge to appropriately signpost to support their specific needs.

### Appendix C

Where required, we used a robust Criminal Justice approach. This demonstrated that Police were approachable and supportive but also took a no nonsense approach. We aimed to provide them with clear information about risk, that we were there to help them but if they stepped over the line, they would be dealt with through the Criminal Justice system. We were transparent, honest and apologetic around historic issues and how they felt they had been dealt with negatively by others. We were clear that no matter what happened before, our approach would be different, to create boundaries and certainty which were perhaps not in place before.

The Youth Diversion Officer and the School Liaison Officer were fully involved to provide a consistent approach to dealing with the identified offenders. Neighbourhood Officers were afforded the opportunity to attend sessions to have that input from start to finish and continue relationship building.

We organised regular meetings with the Tesco store who had the main issues. This ensured excellent lines of communication, reporting and updating were maintained and also used to monitor success or failure. A review of their security was conducted by Tesco and with Police input, Tesco increased security presence at key times. Also, a review of the CCTV quality and coverage of specific areas was conducted and some alterations made, especially at the entrance where youths congregated, entered, exited and stole products. The Crime Prevention Officer delivered the "Shop Safe" Scheme training, aimed at giving staff the knowledge and confidence to deal with incidents whilst promoting a safer working environment. We saw them grow in confidence and learn they had more power to challenge customers.

The Council conducted a site visit and liaised with the Crime Prevention Officer who completed a “designing out crime” report, detailing potential issues and making recommendations. The council erected signage in relation to ‘No alcohol zones’, giving more leverage to the enforcement of this. The Council funded a new hedgerow, planted to prevent the youths being able to access waste land and forest which they would utilise to hide. In line with the situational crime prevention, lighting was also updated in the area which acted as a deterrent, highlighting areas and making them very visible to witnesses or CCTV. The council published plans to re-develop the area and add a skate park like the youths in question had suggested, hoping to give them a sense of ownership and responsibility to look after and be proud of this space.

Police used their social media platform to advertise good new stories relating to young people from the area. One such story was three young boys who talked a man down from a bridge after he was having thoughts of suicide. These young males attended the local youth club with our partners so we advertised it on both platforms and received very positive feedback from the community. We were hoping to challenge and change the public perception of ‘young people’.

Police now utilise this space for a range of events such as pedal bike marking and community engagement activities. We join with partners in community events in the space celebrating the diverse cultures in the area such as, “The International Big Breakfast” where communities and cultures came together to showcase their local cuisine and traditions. This event continues yearly now with other partners taking the lead in organising. We asked the Police Dog Section to use the area to exercise the Police dogs with us when available, promoting a positive reaction whilst also a focused deterrent.

Similar to Brazilian Police findings in the city of Pelotas, they figured out the best intervention in relation to the gang problem was not to tackle the leaders but to move their lieutenants. We took this approach and concentrated our efforts on those on the fringes. Police, The Education Authority (EA) and the Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) joined forces and made an agreement to work together on the development of an educational programme for youths, 13-18 years old. The programme runs weekly in

the evening for two hours and food is provided. Each evening would host a different visitor, topic or activity, normally agreed by the group themselves on the first evening when drawing up their contract of behaviour and expectations, tackling current issues or experiences they are facing. The group is comprised of young people from various schools, religions, races and backgrounds. Young people are selected by the schools, Police or the Education Authority as being on the fringes of getting into trouble or causing some disruption already. Speaking from a Policing perspective this was not only successful in getting them off the streets for an evening and food in their bellies but the young people got to know Police and share information with them regarding Anti-Social Behaviour. We again learned the identities of many of the main culprits and attempted to re-direct them or identify them as suspects when required. We also learned about other factors, parents working long hours etc. and were able to further understand and provide support from other partners in these situations.

A local high profile sports club was contacted and were asked if they would be willing to utilise the area in the evenings as part of their training warm up or cool down. They were aware of the issues and thought it was an excellent idea, considering it as a potential line for recruiting new members to the club. A local running club agreed to use the area more which opened up communication with Police to provide feedback on improvements or otherwise. We were further able to provide these groups with advice on keeping safe and provided personal attack alarms to the members.

Dungannon Youth Resource Centre run a local youth club and agreed to provide outreach in the area. Their Youth Workers walked the lines at key times, spoke with the young people and invited them into the club for a warm space to share, some sports. Police would attend providing food in an initiative called "Pizza with a Peeler" funded by the PSCP.

All of these responses when put together, increased the footprint in the area, helping the community take back control and give the young people access to different outlets with long term potential.

## Assessment:

It has been four years since commencement of the problem solving and we have been continuously assessing and tweaking our responses. We are not arrogant enough to claim the problem is solved, but the youths we dealt with respect the area, no others are there to replace them in the previous manner. We have a better relationship with partners and an excellent relationship with the community.

After a period of three months, all incident data was reviewed and a number of debriefing meetings were held with key partners. This included meetings with retailers, PCSP and the Education Authority. Updates and evaluations from the Council and a review meeting with the local youth workers and youth Diversion Officer. Whilst the problems had not been eradicated, that had been significantly reduced! During the meetings, all agreed that the key partners would continue to meet on a regular basis. Certain resources could be stripped back, especially from a Policing perspective, allowing the key partners to take on and maintain their valuable roles within the community and the long term resolution of this problem.

The 'designing out crime' recommendations and the re-development of the area by the Council are progressing. We reviewed the hedgerow that was planted and conceded that the plants were too young and small and some ended up being trodden on to make paths through. Feedback was welcomed by all parties be it positive or negative. We should never shy away or fear sharing the negatives as this can be where we learn the most! Local authority are now more aware of the need to consult on future projects planned for the local park and are willing to do so.

## Appendix D

One experienced Police officer who had worked in the area for approximately 20 years commented to the neighbourhood policing Team he was, 'astonished by the progression made, being able to be out on foot in an area where this was previously unheard of and

the young locals knew the Neighbourhood Officers by name.’ He considered the Team’s presence and engagement with the group on that evening to have significantly reduced the likelihood of harm and criminality commencing.

Some of the statistics collated below help to demonstrate the improvement, give or take the complex nature of closing down incidents for quite a large area and taking the Covid 19 pandemic into consideration.

Anti-social behavior calls in the area have been significantly reduced. Taking into consideration that during the pandemic, calls related to that may have been included. Also considering that the years prior to 2020 we know that incidents were underreported.

Thefts have also significantly reduced and in 2018/2019 we are aware that incidents were going unreported so this figure could have been much higher.

#### Appendix E

The community who initially had given up hope, were now seeing results beyond what they expected. The Local Policing Team have also noted a significant change in the area, there is a significant reduction in calls and a better relationship in general with the young people towards all Police.

#### Appendix F



The positive outcomes of this work were communicated to the local community through the local newspapers and social media. Two of the young people involved in the original problems at the commencement of the problem solving approach have since become volunteers at the Dungannon Youth Resource Centre as helpers for the youth club with the intention of ultimately following a career path in youth work! I was astounded that our intention to tackle a problem of anti-social behaviour has potentially changed the life course for some of the people in the area. None of it possible without support from colleagues, partners and the community. We know there is still work to do but we are committed and in a much better position now to continue to succeed.

Simply put, in the words of Helen Keller:

“Alone, we can do so little; together we can do so much”

Appendix A



## Appendix B

# Masonry thrown through police car in Dungannon as officers respond to anti-social behaviour

by Staff Reporter April 3, 2020



## Petrol bombs thrown during night of disorder in Dungannon

8th August 2021



## Police car in Dungannon 'attacked with bricks'



A gang of up to 30 people, including masked men, threw masonry and petrol bombs during a night of disorder in Co Tyrone.

Police are investigating a number of incidents which happened in Dungannon on Saturday night.

From around 10.40pm to around 2.30am, a number of reports were made about incidents in the Ballygawley Road area.

It is believed approximately 20 to 30 people, including a number of masked individuals, were involved.



"We will continue to monitor the area and would warn anyone contemplating becoming involved in such criminal activity to think twice.



PSNI picture of the aftermath of last year's disorder on the Ballygawley Road, Dungannon.

## Appendix C

Hi Joanne

On behalf of myself and Manager Malachy, I would like to thank the Neighbourhood team for Dungannon area for the support over the last few months.

The store was really struggling with ASB from the youths in the area which was becoming really brand damaging, effecting customer experience and safety of our colleagues and managers.

Officer Colin Ryan partnered with Malachy in identifying the youths involved in the kicking of the coins, throwing carrots, smashing the front door, stealing hand sanitizer and dealing with them personally. The youths who were causing the real issues are now barred and appropriate action has been taken by the police.

As a store, they also want to thank them for the increased patrols within the store and it has been commented by both customers, colleagues and managers the impact this has had on the store for feeling safe while shopping/working in Tesco.

**Thanks,**

**Karen Pearson**

*Shrink & Security Partner*

*Groups 100, 101 & 102*

*Safety, Security & Shrinkage*

**Tel. 07925126955**

Tesco House, Shire Park, Kestrel Way, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 1GA.

[www.tescopl.com](http://www.tescopl.com) | @tesconews



everyone • every day • home safely



## Appendix D

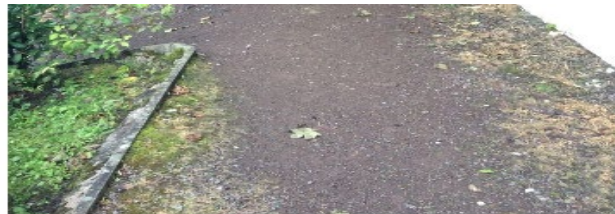
# Brighter days ahead for Railway Park, Dungannon as lighting improvements get underway

by Staff Reporter December 24, 2020



# Council to spend more than £14,000 tackling anti-social behaviour at a Dungannon Park

by Adam Morton, Local Democracy Reporter November 10, 2020



If you go down to the woods today..... You actually won't believe your eyes! The people of Dungannon, including us, are totally fed up with the constant anti-social behaviour and lack of respect being shown for what should be a peaceful natural setting. Recently we have had crowds loitering in the area and worse still, we have also had windows damaged on 'The Junction' building, a building designed specifically to assist and support local people. This damage will now cost thousands to repair, money that should be going towards helping and improving your local community. Customers in the Community Honesty cafe now have to endure looking out at their park through smashed windows because some individual thought smashing them up was an acceptable way to spend their evening. Despicable! We will be upping patrols in this area but we can't be everywhere at once. We need your help to use your park to the full. It's our belief that the more community groups and people that use the park, the less desirable it will be for the trouble makers to loiter in! Take back the park today! If you want to organise something in the park and want us with you then just PM us and we will do our best. #TakeBackThePark

If you go down to the woods today.....

You actually won't believe your eyes! The people of Dungannon, including us, are totally fed up with the constant anti-social behaviour and lack of respect being shown for what should be a peaceful natural setting.

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We will be upping patrols in this area but we can't be everywhere at once. We need your help to use your park to the full. It's our belief that the more community groups and people that use the park, the less desirable it will be for the trouble makers to loiter in! Take back the park today!

If you want to organise something in the park and want us with you then just PM us and we will do our best.

#TakeBackThePark

Aug 21, 2019, 1:25 PM

#TakeBackThePark

Appendix E

ASB (NB: covid related ASB will have impacted 2020 and some of 2021):

<b>Calendar</b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2018</b>	<b>184</b>
<b>2019</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>2020</b>	<b>281</b>
<b>2021</b>	<b>216</b>
<b>2022</b>	<b>120</b>

Appendix F

Theft:

<b>Calendar</b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2018</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>2019</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>2020</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>2021</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>2022</b>	<b>51</b>



Thank you for reading our entry.

Submitted by Dungannon Neighborhood Policing Team

Inspector Joanne Gibson

Sergeant Jeffrey Young

Constable Hugh McKay

Constable Colin Ryan

Constable Victoria Willis

**Police Service of Northern Ireland**