

A strategic vision for Restorative Justice in Cambridgeshire

Restorative Justice (RJ) is a process which “brings those harmed by crime or conflict, and those responsible for the harm, into communication, enabling everyone affected by a particular incident to play a part in repairing the harm and finding a positive way forward”.

Strategic benefits of Restorative Justice

1.1 Increase in victim satisfaction

Independent research and evidence show that when used appropriately RJ delivers significant improvements in a victim’s satisfaction in the way their case is dealt with. Victims are empowered and able to suggest how the offender can acknowledge the impact of their actions and make reparation. Researchers have also found that those victims involved in full conferences were less likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress symptoms; and three times more likely to experience a degree of closure, thus enabling them to cope and recover from the crime committed against them.

1.2 Reduction in re-offending

Studies also show that levels of repeat offending are lower in offenders who have taken part in full conferences. Offenders who meet their victim, or their victim’s representative, and hear from them the impact their crime has had are more likely to appreciate the effect of their behaviour. RJ has shown to be as effective in promoting desistance with adults as with young offenders. At a local level the Constabulary has found that in a three-year period an average of only 12 per cent of people initially dealt with through street-level RJ went on to re-offend. This translates into fewer people entering the Criminal Justice System, fewer victims of crime and increased capacity for the police and partner agencies to re-invest their resources into tackling persistent repeat offenders and preventative work.

1.3 Builds safer, stronger communities and community cohesion

With formal Criminal Justice sanctions there may continue to be reoccurrences of the same issue if victims and offenders have not resolved their differences; a restorative intervention at an early stage can prevent escalation from a minor conflict to a major event. RJ can increase and restore a sense of ‘community’ where offenders repair the harm done directly to the individual or the neighbourhood, allowing reintegration and a return to normality. It also gives the police and partner agencies opportunities to engage with the community, victims of crime and offenders who commit crime. Street-level RJ also allows criminal justice professionals the opportunity to use discretion and professional judgement to deal with low level crime and anti-social behaviour in a way which doesn’t criminalise people unnecessarily.

2. Our Vision

2.1 The Constabulary will work in partnership with other agencies to develop, embed and deliver an extended range of appropriate and sustainable Restorative Justice interventions which:

- improve victim satisfaction – effective RJ solutions should be integrated within the services offered by the new Victims’ Hub. This will enable a consistent, co-ordinated and proactive victim-centred approach to be taken and ensure victims of crime have the choice to access RJ at a time and in a way that is right for them. It will also support the Constabulary’s ethos of safeguarding the most vulnerable.
- promote desistance - this should include extending the types of crimes RJ is used for and ensuring RJ is used to best effect with a wider range of offenders.
- create safer, stronger communities with low crime rates, low numbers of victims and high numbers of people willing to be witnesses. Residents with good wellbeing and mental health who are engaged with, and confident in, statutory agencies. This will include giving the community a voice to address long-standing concerns through developing the use of Community Trigger and Community Remedy for low level crime and anti-social behaviour and Community Justice Panels.
- make the best use of reducing resources ensuring both Constabulary staff, volunteers and partners are appropriately trained and empowered to deliver a wider range of RJ outcomes. This will still include the use ‘street level RJ disposals’.

2.2 The delivery of the vision will require:

- Raising awareness of the positive benefits of the use of RJ across the Criminal Justice System, partner agencies and our communities.
- Drawing on the knowledge and skills of RJ experts to create a delivery plan which enables the Constabulary to integrate the delivery of RJ and community justice within the Criminal Justice System in partnership with other agencies.
- Exploiting national best practice and new legislation to maximise the opportunities to use RJ.