

New early warning system spearheads battle against anti-social behaviour

Ground-breaking scheme to identify potential victims and give them protection launched by local council and Home Office

People at risk of attack or abuse by gangs of youths are to be identified by a new early warning system and offered targeted support and protection under a ground-breaking scheme launched with official backing today.

The pioneering move comes in the wake of the Pilkington case in which a mother and daughter took their own lives after being plagued for years by troublemakers and against the background of mounting public alarm over anti-social behaviour.

The early warning system will use a Victims and Vulnerable Persons Index (VVPI) that is being compiled by a specialist software and analytics company in association with the Home Office.

A pilot scheme designed to test its effectiveness will begin today in North Lincolnshire.

Initial estimates suggest that the early warning system could save local agencies £800,000 a year in reduced accident and emergency admissions and police and criminal justice costs.

If the same savings could be repeated across England and Wales, the Government could slash costs in these areas by an estimated £300 million a year.

Already it is intended that members of a consortium of police forces and other partnership agencies, including North Lincolnshire, Newcastle and Northumbria, and Lancashire will instigate similar projects in their own area. These projects will be based upon lessons learnt from the North Lincolnshire pilot.

Public concern about anti-social behaviour has soared in recent years, with the need to protect vulnerable people in society rising to the top of the crime and disorder agenda.

A recent HMIC/Ipos/MORI survey of people who had called the police about anti-social behaviour found that more than half did not feel informed about action to tackle the problem and thought it important or essential that steps were taken.

In 2009/10, there were 3.5 million calls to police about anti-social behaviour, according to official figures, but that was estimated to be only a quarter of all such incidents.

The study led the Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Denis O Connor, to call for more early-intervention strategies that nip much more of the problem in the bud. The early warning system, devised by niche software company, Xantura allows local government agencies to join up the dots and take early action to safeguard and support vulnerable people.

Xantura, uses a data-sharing platform to pull together information held by separate agencies – such as the police, the probation service, social services, schools, GPs and hospitals, youth offending teams, local councils, and benefit offices – and creates a VVPI or score for levels of risk of crime or anti social behaviour for individuals in a particular place.

For individuals at highest risk, and depending on the levels of crime and anti-social behaviour in their area, likely victims will be flagged up to local safety teams, responsible for taking action to prevent further victimisation.

Stuart Minto, Head of Safer Neighbourhoods in North Lincolnshire, said the solution developed by Xantura was critical to constructing the risk index.

The ability to share information, provide a joined up approach to tackling anti-social behaviour and the provision of support to vulnerable people should be at the heart of any partnership, he added.

Wajid Shafiq, Xantura's chief executive, said current arrangements for identifying potential victims of crime or anti-social behaviour were inadequate.

Currently there is no effective early warning system to flag up vulnerable people at risk, and the data is held in an uncoordinated manner, making it difficult to derive any meaningful information, he explained.

We also believe there is huge scope for much-needed budget savings and greater operational efficiency. Data is currently held in dozens of silos and no one is joining up the dots. Our solution brings it all together so that effective action can be taken to protect people at risk like Fiona Pilkington and her daughter Francesca.

Fiona Pilkington, 38, from Barwell, near Hinckley in Leicestershire and her 18-year-old severely disabled daughter Francesca were found dead in a burned out car in October 2007 after suffering years of abuse by yobs.

An inquest found that police errors and inaction were partly responsible for driving the vulnerable single mother to kill herself and her daughter. The Independent Police Complaints Commission has begun an inquiry into the way 10 Leicestershire police officers handled the case.

Returning a verdict of suicide on Ms Pilkington and unlawful killing for her 18-year-old daughter, the inquest jury decided that the police action "contributed" to the deaths, notably the failure of officers to connect dozens of separate calls for assistance.

Mr Shafiq commented: Warning lights should flash across councils, but unfortunately the systems are not in place.

It is clear that earlier interventions are more cost effective as problems tend to become more intractable as time progresses.

And with no complex technology project to implement, the solution can be implemented in a matter of months (typically 6), in a low-cost, simple and effective manner.

The North Lincolnshire pilot is being supported by the Home Office and is backed by a grant from the Local Government Improvement and Development Agency Customer Led Transformation Fund (part of the Local Government Association). Xantura's platform has developed after research sponsored by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

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Notes to Editors:

For media enquiries, please contact Romilly Dennys, Media Intelligence Partners on 0203 0088149 or 07786221309.

About Xantura:

Xantura is a consulting and technology company focused on embedding the innovative use of citizen and patient data into health and local government services. They have developed a unique data sharing and analytics platform (informed by work undertaken for the Department for Communities and Local Government and reviewed by the Information Commissioner's Office) that draws securely on records from different agencies and information from service users themselves to create powerful insight into individuals' care needs, and links it to the actions required to meet

those needs.