

Are teenage drug dealers criminals or victims?

We are all concerned about drugs and drug dealing in our borough. Drug dealing is classified as a serious organised crime by the police and has the extra complexity of being a “county lines” crime. This means the crime extends beyond the confines of our county and investigations need to make use of other forces and agencies around the UK. In the case of drug investigations in Surrey, the net can often spread to London, the Midlands and Manchester.

This leads me to the title of this article: are teenagers and vulnerable people dealing in drugs genuine criminals, or are they a victim of circumstances? The drug gangs entice children and vulnerable people into the business with considerable rewards such as cash and consumables. From doing small jobs, such as delivering a package to an address, the victim is gradually sucked in.

A system of reward can soon turn into physical and mental abuse. The earlier the victim can be identified, the easier it is to take them out of the system. The police would much rather they remained out of the world of crime and became a young model citizen with no criminal record to blight their future. But the police are often also restricted as to what they can do, especially with those under 18. As much as they would like a youth to be detained, they often have to release them back into the community pending further investigations. And the police are sometimes just as frustrated as we are with some of the lenient sentences handed out by the courts.

Some will say, “the police never do anything”, but they are actually doing a great deal. Here in Woking, they do an excellent job of keeping the problem under control, but they need us – the public – to report what we believe is drug dealing on our streets.

Please report all actual and possible drug dealing to the police, as it helps them build a picture of where and how the gangs operate. Anyone can contact the police by dialling 101, or 999 in an emergency. Those who wish to remain completely anonymous can call Crimestoppers on 0800 555111. The police can’t be expected to tackle the problem if we don’t tell them about it!

Let’s face it, the arrest of a teenager selling drugs to some other teenagers is not going to stop drug crime. The police have to take a holistic approach to the problem – keeping constant pressure on a large number of criminals while carrying out valuable crime prevention by educating schoolchildren about the dangers of drugs. The police will always target the gang leaders, and periodic high-profile arrests in Surrey are usually coordinated with other forces elsewhere.

The police, along with other excellent agencies such as Crimestoppers’ Fearless arm, do major campaigns to educate as many children as possible about the dangers of drugs – whether that is taking drugs or working for gangs. Adults are also educated on what to look out for in their own children and grandchildren. Remember that all children are born innocent, and it is adults who turn them into criminals.