

Police in East Lothian pledge to tackle 'misery' caused by youth behaviour

Police have pledged to tackle antisocial behaviour in East Lothian's biggest town after a small group of youths were blamed for bring misery to the lives of locals.

Nearly half of antisocial behaviour complaints made in the county over the first six months of this year came from Musselburgh, with young people at the centre of a growing number of incidents.

A meeting of East Lothian Council's Police and Fire Rescue Board this week heard the situation had seen officers working with the council's community protection team, youth workers and support organisations to tackle the issues.

Chief Inspector Ben Leathes, local area commander, told the board the force was working to "outlaw this sort of behaviour that distresses people and makes people's lives a misery".

Earlier in the meeting the board heard that while the county saw few incidents relating to bonfire night last month they saw more trouble for officers to deal with over Halloween from youths.

Mr Leathes said in his report that he witnessed the problems first hand.

He said: "I was out on patrol with my response and community officers over Halloween and witnessed some of this behaviour first-hand and am first in recognising that there is still work to be done to tackle the root causes."

However he ruled out any suggestion that free bus passes were responsible for the increased problems with youths in the town saying the benefits of the service still outweighed the negatives.

Police have been working with local bus companies and putting patrol on board some routes where issues have been raised.

Mr Leathes said: "There is an element of travel through Musselburgh which adds to the problems we have seen but in isolation I don't think access to public transport is a driver behind what is happening in Musselburgh."

Instead he backed work being carried out in the town to provide more youth clubs and work with young people in the town saying: "Ultimately we want to see opportunities for young people to behave in the right way and have good access to leisure facilities.

"Equally we are working with parents and in schools to educate them in how their behaviour impacts on others."

The board heard there had been 986 complaints about antisocial behaviour between April and September this year – an increase of six per cent on the same period last year – with 42 per cent coming from Musselburgh.

Kenny Black, the council's community protection team manager, said that while there had been an increase in the number of youth related antisocial behaviour complaints in Musselburgh, work was ongoing to look at both preventative measures and enforcement.

He said: "In recent weeks, meetings have taken place

between senior members of staff from within the relevant partnership organisations to identify any gaps in the preventative and early intervention approach to tackling the behaviour of this small minority of young people who are engaging in the behaviour described.”

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter