

What it is

Arrest Referral (AR) is an early-intervention approach that aims to identify and address the underlying causes of offending at the point of arrest or while a person is in police custody. It connects individuals with support services, particularly for substance use, mental health, housing, welfare and other social needs, with the objective of reducing further offending and improving wellbeing.

AR recognises the opportunity to help people engage with services at a 'teachable moment'. It takes place in police custody suites or court premises. The intervention may range from providing information and advice through to assessment and referral to appropriate services.

Resources

Read more about Arrest Referral in the document: [CJS-Guidance-National-Template-Arrest-Referral.pdf](#)

Contact the CJAP Team at communityjusticeayrshire@north-ayrshire.gov.uk

Why it matters

[The Scottish Government's National Strategy for Community Justice](#) identifies improving support from the point of arrest as a priority, emphasising person-centred care in police custody and strengthened referral pathways to support services.

AR supports Scotland's public health approach by recognising that offending behaviour is often linked to underlying health, social and economic needs that can be addressed through early intervention and support.

People who enter police custody are often less engaged with support services and may experience poorer health and wellbeing outcomes than the general population.

Benefits

Intervening at this early stage can provide immediate harm-reduction benefits, act as a gateway into services, and contribute to reducing reoffending.

Evidence suggests that AR can improve engagement with support services, increasing the likelihood that individuals will address the factors contributing to their behaviour and reducing the likelihood of future contact with the justice system.

How it works

After someone is arrested, custody staff will ask them about their needs. Where appropriate, staff can discuss making an arrest referral on their behalf.

In some areas, Custody Navigators (often employed by third-sector organisations) attend custody centres to engage directly with individuals and facilitate referrals.

Arrest Referrals are voluntary and are made with the individual's consent.

The aim is to connect people with appropriate support, treatment or interventions, reducing the likelihood of future offending behaviour and improving personal outcomes.

Arrest Referral

Your role

Police custody staff play a vital role in maximising the impact of Arrest Referral.

Police Scotland has been tasked with leading work to increase referrals from custody into support services, including establishing a national working group to promote good practice and improve consistency.

CJAP partners have an important role in ensuring that people identified in police custody are connected quickly to appropriate support services. All partners should consider how their services can respond to referrals from custody, raise awareness of local support pathways, and contribute to improving outcomes at the earliest opportunity.

Key facts

- Arrest Referral is a critical early-intervention approach that identifies underlying needs at the point of arrest and connects people with essential support services.
- Effective Arrest Referral can reduce harm, improve wellbeing and contribute to reducing repeat offending.
- Police Scotland is currently redesigning Arrest Referral arrangements across Scotland to improve consistency and enhance support for vulnerable individuals in custody.
- There is currently no national Arrest Referral service, and local processes vary.
- In Ayrshire, custody staff can signpost individuals to relevant services and make referrals to We Are With You, Turning Point Scotland, Recovery Ayr and NOVA Scotland.