

**Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour**  
**Learning from experience**  
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## **Introduction**

Anti-social behaviour has gained increasing prominence both in the minds of policy makers and local communities. There is a growing perception that the behaviour of many individuals is spiralling out of control and causing considerable harm to others and whole communities. According to the British Crime Survey 2003/04 one in five people say that there is a high level of disorder in their area and over a quarter of the public perceive particular behaviours such as vandalism, graffiti, litter and teenagers hanging around as a problem in their local area.

In response to this growing concern, the government has established the Anti Social Behaviour Unit within the Home Office, tasked with driving forward a new policy agenda to tackle anti-social behaviour. In September 2003, the Unit conducted the first ever national day count of anti-social behaviour. It recorded 66,107 incidents of anti-social behaviour, equivalent to more than one report every two seconds or around 16.5million reports a year. In financial terms, anti-social behaviour recorded on the day of the count cost agencies in England and Wales at least £13.5M; this equates to around £3.4bn a year.

The report covered a wide spectrum of activity ranging from litter or rubbish dropping to prostitution, and clearly demonstrated that anti-social behaviour in all its manifestations has a devastating effect both on the daily lives of individuals and local communities. Often it is a problem that is more prevalent in deprived neighbourhoods, damaging communities that are already fragile and where services are overstretched. This creates an environment where crime can take hold and people begin to feel higher levels of fear or anxiety about crime in their neighbourhood.

Not surprisingly local authorities and other key agencies have a critical role to play at the local level in developing appropriate strategies and solutions to tackle the varied and multifaceted problems many communities face. Much of the work in this field is very new and this report examines some of the current innovative ways local authorities and other agencies are tackling the problems. In particular the report focuses on approaches that seek to change or challenge patterns of anti-social behaviour, rather than simply manage the behaviour.

## Defining Anti-Social Behaviour

Defining anti-social behaviour is often problematic. Usually people's understanding of anti-social behaviour is based on their own individual perception of what is and isn't acceptable behaviour. In addition, it can clearly include behaviour that is either criminal or non-criminal in nature.

The Crime and Disorder Act (1998), which heralded the arrival of anti-social behaviour orders, defines it as behaving in '*... a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm, distress to one or more persons not of the same household as himself*'.

The accompanying guidance note produced in March 1999 offered further clarification. Making it clear that the term did not refer to '*...run of the mill disputes*', the guidance went on to provide a comprehensive list of situations to which anti-social behaviour could apply under the Act. These were:

- violence, threats of violence and other intimidating behaviour directed at neighbours
- persistent and unruly behaviour by a small group of individuals on an estate
- families whose behaviour when challenged leads to abuse
- vandalism
- graffiti
- persistent abusive behaviour towards the elderly or the disabled
- serious and persistent bullying of children in schools
- persistent racist or homophobic behaviour
- persistent anti-social behaviour as a result of drugs and alcohol.

In March 2003, the government's White Paper '*Respect and Responsibility*', reasserted the government's position, but emphasised the need for '*a cultural shift from a society where too many people are living with the consequences of anti-social behaviour, to a society where we respect each other, our property and our shared public spaces*'. Emphasis was placed on balancing the rights of individuals with their responsibility to behaviour in a respectful and responsible manner towards others.

These themes were to be embedded in the subsequent '*Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan*', produced by the Home Office's Anti Social Behaviour Unit in October 2003, and enshrined in the Anti Social Behaviour Act which came into force in January 2004. The measures contained in the Act build on existing legislation to give the police, local authorities and other key agencies a broader range of powers to tackle anti-social behaviour.

But in order to develop a focus for work aimed at tackling local anti-social behaviour problems agencies need to identify the behaviours that are a particular problem within their locality, how these behaviours are perceived and what impact they have locally.

## Tackling anti-social behaviour –Learning from experience

The Research Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office (RDS) has developed a typology of anti-social behaviour, which provides a useful framework and guide to the main categories of behaviour that are widely accepted to be anti-social behaviour by both practitioners and the public.

A copy of the RDS report *'Defining and measuring anti-social behaviour' (2004)* can be obtained from the following link:

[www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/dpr26.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/dpr26.pdf)

## **An A-Z of Anti-Social Behaviour Measures**

This section outlines some of the key measures introduced by the government to tackle anti-social behaviour. It also highlights some of the active interventions local practitioners are using to tackle the problem of anti-social behaviour in their community.

**Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs):** a voluntary written agreement between someone who has been involved in anti-social behaviour and one or more local agency whose role it is to prevent such behaviour, such as the police or council. By signing the contract, the perpetrator agrees not to continue with such behaviour. If the contract is broken, the person may be served with an anti-social behaviour order.

**Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs):** Introduced as part of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, an anti-social behaviour order is a court order that is used to deter individuals who carry out persistent and serious anti-social behaviour.

It can be served on anyone over the age of ten and lasts for a minimum of two years. An order can contain conditions to prevent the offender from committing specific anti-social behaviour acts, associating with certain named individuals or from entering a defined area.

Orders can be applied for by the police (including the British Transport Police), local authorities, and more recently under the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003, county councils, housing action trusts and registered social landlords (RSLs). The breach of an ASBO is a criminal offence, for which someone can be arrested and imprisoned for a maximum of five years.

**Closure of crack houses:** The police now have the power to close down premises being used for the supply or use of Class 'A' drugs where there is associated nuisance or disorder. Local authorities must be consulted on the closure notice.

**Court injunctions:** Amendments to the Housing Act 1996 gives social landlords the right to seek injunctions against anti-social behaviour or conduct which is capable of causing nuisance or annoyance, and which may affect their housing management functions. Landlords can now obtain injunctions to:

- restrain the use of housing accommodation for unlawful purposes
- exclude a person from an area and attach powers of arrest if their behaviour includes violence or the threat of violence
- apply to the court for a 'demotion order' that replaces a tenants existing tenancy with less secure type of tenancy, removing their right-to-buy for at least a year.

**Community conferencing:** Seeks to bring together the community, the victim and the offender in a mediated forum to look at how the anti-social behaviour has affected all parties, as a tool to combat anti-social behaviour. Thames Valley police is currently involved in formulating a mediation training package and protocols with members of its Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.

The aim is to build upon existing restorative justice skills to tackle anti social behaviour by utilising a community conferencing model.

**Community Justice Centres:** Based on a US model and currently being piloted in the UK. Community Justice Centres aim to deliver a less impersonal and more responsive court service: one dedicated not merely to convicting and punishing criminals, but to working with other services to prevent crime and repair some of the damage done by crime within a particular community. The country's first Community Justice Centre is due to open later this year in North Liverpool.

**Dispersal of groups:** The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 extends police powers to disperse or ban groups in designated areas where members of the public have been intimidated or harassed by the presence or behaviour of the group, and where anti-social behaviour is believed to be a significant problem. If they refuse to go, they can be given a fixed penalty fine. Police can also take home unsupervised children and young people up to the age of 16 if found in such areas after 9.00pm.

**Firearms:** The Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 makes it an offence to carry an air weapon or imitation firearm without lawful or reasonable excuse. In addition, in respect of air weapons, the legal age at which they can be obtained must be 17. It is also an offence to give an air weapon or ammunition as a gift to an under 17 year old.

**Graffiti and litter measures:** The 2003 Act enables local authorities to issue fixed penalty notices to those who have carried out acts of graffiti or fly-posting. Authorities also have the power to issue graffiti notices, requiring people to remove graffiti. If the graffiti is not removed within the specified period the authority can remove the graffiti themselves and charge the owner for this service.

**High hedges:** Neighbours who cannot resolve their disputes over high hedges will in future be able to appeal to their local authority to intervene. Under the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 local authorities will be able to issue formal notices ordering the hedge to be cut and if the owner of the hedge does not, they could face a fine of up to £1,000 or the council will cut the hedge back themselves.

The council will only consider complaints where:

## Tackling anti-social behaviour –Learning from experience

- the hedge is evergreen
- over two metres high
- blocking out light
- access or 'reasonable enjoyment' of neighbours property is affected.

**Landlords to publish action plans:** Social landlords (local housing authorities, registered social landlords and housing action trusts) now have to publish guidelines explaining how they will deal with anti-social behaviour.

**Mediation:** Is a process in which an impartial third-party, the mediator, is used to help people in dispute work out an agreement. The aim is for the people in dispute to reach an agreement on what should happen and to accept and keep to this agreement. The role of the mediator is to bring the people concerned together, facilitate the meeting, act independently, listening to what the people have to say but to allow them the opportunity to find and agree their own solution.

Mediation nationally has grown steadily since the 1980s and now operates in a wide variety of settings, including family work and commercial disputes. Reading Borough Council's Housing Department has been using it to deal with its anti-social behaviour and nuisance cases. It has found that having access to good quality mediation provides a significant benefit to its department, not only in time and energy of its staff, but also in the quality of services it provides to tenants experiencing difficulties.

**Noise nuisance:** The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 enables local authorities to make a closure order against premises where:

- a public nuisance is being caused by noise coming from the premises, and
- it is necessary to close the premises to stop the noise.

Notices can last 24 hours; breach is subject to a £20,000 fine, three months imprisonment or both.

**Parenting contracts:** These are voluntary arrangements where both the parents and an institution such as a local authority youth offending team agree a system for improving a child's behaviour. Schools and local education authorities can now enter parenting contracts with the parent of a child who has been truanting or excluded from school.

**Parenting orders:** Parenting orders could only be used by the courts when a child or young person was convicted of a crime. However they can now be used when a child or young person has engaged in anti-social behaviour or criminal conduct. Parents will be obliged to attend a residential parenting course and will be made responsible for making sure their child goes to school.

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**Penalty notices:** Local authorities, head teachers and the police are able to issue fines to parents if their child plays truant. If the penalty is not paid then the local authority can bring a prosecution.

The Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 will also be amended to incorporate penalty notices for disorderly behaviour by persons aged 16 and over. It also allows the Secretary of State to make regulations to amend this provision to allow penalty notices to be issued against young people aged ten or over. In cases where the young person is below 16 and unable or unwilling to pay the penalty, their guardian or parent can be served with the notice and made liable for any payment.

**Public order and trespass:** The police now have extended powers to deal with raves, trespass and removal of vehicles from land.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour: A balanced approach?**

The government has been very keen to encourage agencies to use the powers contained in the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 and other available legislation to work with the local community to tackle anti-social behaviour. It has been particularly vocal in calling upon such agencies as the police and local authority to ‘tackle not tolerate’ anti-social behaviour and to not shy away from their responsibilities in using the full range of powers available to them, including enforcement measures, to tackle the problem locally.

The LGIU very much supports the role councils have to play in tackling anti-social behaviour at the local level. However, we have consistently called upon the government for a more measured approach to tackling anti-social behaviour, one which seeks to support prevention and active intervention work, as well as tackling more directly issues of poverty, isolation, community cohesion and physical/social regeneration.

Furthermore, we have continued to stress the need for improved links to be made between different areas of government policy, including neighbourhood renewal, the national alcohol harm reduction strategy, drug action and reforms of the police service and criminal justice agencies.

Our particular concern with the government’s policy is that by focusing so heavily on enforcement as a solution to anti-social behaviour it neglects to address many of the underlying causes of an individual’s anti-social behaviour. Research has shown that potential perpetrators of anti-social behaviour are more likely to be exposed to, or experience, any of the following risk factors: family conflict, poor parental supervision/discipline, drug or alcohol dependency, deprivation, mental health issues, low educational attainment/lack of skills and school or community disorganisation. Yet little seems to be made available in the government’s anti-social behaviour package to enable agencies to work with individuals on tackling these problems. Indeed, individuals who are most at risk or vulnerable face an increased chance of being further socially excluded or criminalised for their behaviour.

Furthermore, the use of enforcement measures can simply displace the individual to another geographical area or part of the community, where their pattern of behaviour continues to happen with the same effect. This raises concerns about the sustainability of the government’s approach in the long-term.

Of course, in some cases enforcement can and does work but in striking a balanced approach the government needs to provide local authorities and other agencies with appropriate resources and support to invest in locally driven programmes and initiatives that can help them to tackle local problems. A successful strategy should include all three elements: prevention, intervention and enforcement.

## Tackling anti-social behaviour –Learning from experience

In 2004 the LGIU piloted a series of study visits to bring together practitioners and policy makers working on anti-social behaviour from across our affiliates. Events were held in Hastings, Leeds and Camden. Each event focused on a different theme and highlighted:

- the need for locally-led solutions
- a high level of partnership working across agencies
- a mixed approach to solving local problems.

The following section expands on the good practice identified from these study visits and work that is already being done in other areas in response to the challenges of anti-social behaviour.

## **Learning from Experience**

### **Managing anger in the early years, the need to understand and manage anti-social behaviour in nursery and primary schools in the London Borough of Lambeth.**

Research shows that aggressive behaviour in children predicts risk of later delinquency, substance abuse, school dropout, early parenthood, and depression.

Responding to concerns about the growing level of disruption and the number of exclusions of children from early years settings, due to inappropriate and often violent behaviour, Alan Grocock, an education officer in Lambeth, resolved to try and do something about the situation.

In 2002, he approached the education authority with the idea of piloting a new scheme he had learnt about from the USA, called '*Second-Step*'. The programme aims to improve children's abilities to manage and control their feelings by empowering them to think for themselves about their behaviour and to develop problem solving strategies to address particular behavioural difficulties or problems. Initially 12 local schools decided to participate in the pilot phase, (now over 200 schools across the UK use the programme).

The programme recognises that often there are four main reasons as to why children fail to demonstrate positive social skills. These are:

- a lack of positive modelling
- a lack of practice
- desired behaviours being inhibited by emotional responses
- inappropriate beliefs regarding aggression.

The programme addresses these through teacher-modelling, role playing new skills, teaching children a series of calming down steps and by teaching perspective taking. Children learn how to evaluate solutions to problems based on how they feel, identifying with real problems and developing a variety of ways to resolve them.

The focus is on teaching children empathy, emotion management and problem solving/impulse control. A series of lesson-based activities are used to reinforce positive social skills. The programme has proved so successful that it now operates in over half the schools in Lambeth and has been expanded to include both junior and secondary schools.

The approach focuses on modelling behaviour rather than seeking to control bad behaviour and is made available to everyone in the class rather than targeting identified individuals with behavioural problems, thus removing the possibility of individual stigmatisation and social exclusion.

## Tackling anti-social behaviour –Learning from experience

Although still embryonic in the UK, longitudinal research studies from the USA and other countries show that children who have participated in the second–step programme are less disruptive, less aggressive and less likely to participate in anti-social behaviour.

The success factors behind this include:

- enabling children to question their own behaviour and empowering them to develop problem solving strategies in a supportive environment
- intervention starts when the child is very young and should continue hopefully throughout their school life, helping them to develop empathy and positive social skills leading to long term change in behaviour
- the programme focuses on the whole class, as opposed to working with identified children, so avoids stigmatising the individual child or making them feel socially excluded
- parents can become engaged in the process and help support and enforce learning outcomes at home.

### **Families in Focus - Working with families in the London Borough of Camden to make things better.**

Families in Focus is a multi agency community based project working with children, young people aged four to 16 and their families, who are at risk of anti-social behaviour and/or offending. The project's aims are:

- to support children, young people and their families in diverse communities to value each other and develop communication, mediation and problem solving approaches
- to empower children, young people and their carers to take control of their lives, improving the quality of their lives and in turn the quality of life in the community.

Managed by the Leisure and Community Services Department's play services within the local authority, the project works in partnership with other council departments, the police, voluntary sector and local residents to provide a programme of activities for children and young people to encourage self-esteem, confidence building and to develop new skills and interests. This is combined with targeted interventions to support the wider family.

The staff team is made up of five community workers, a project manager and a finance and administrative officer. All of the staff come from a range of backgrounds and experience, which that has enabled the project to work very effectively across agencies and with the local community.

Over the last year, the project has expanded to work with individual children or young people referred to it by the Camden Town and Holborn Youth Inclusion and Support Panels (YISPs).

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The staff provide support in a number of different ways. These include:

- family trips to promote positive interaction
- casework on drugs, alcohol, housing and child protection issues
- home visits for 'hard to reach' families
- joint working with social services and Sure Start
- family group conferences and restorative justice –working with the extended family as defined by themselves to meet and draw up a child's action plan
- community based parenting programmes looking at violence to the self, to peers and family, and to communities.

Research conducted by local residents and young people about the quality of life, unmet need and impact of 'Families in Focus' indicates young people felt the project had helped them:

- appreciate the community
- value diversity
- understand right from wrong
- keep safe and stay out of trouble.

Adults said:

- they were less worried about their children
- children were less bored, were learning about new things and staying out of trouble.

The project's success is put down to a number of key factors:

- its flexibility, responsiveness and empowering approach –providing a bottom-up approach with local offices on estates
- the provision of long-term support for families as well as children and young people
- combines prevention and intervention
- high level of commitment and ownership from community leaders willing to try new approaches
- skilled community workers working closely with and regularly consulting the whole community
- maximising use of, and working with, other services.

The project has also identified a number of wider lessons:

- flexibility and visibility are crucial – enabling rapid response to changing circumstances and different communities
- build on the strengths, skills and aspirations of local communities and families
- creative use of current thinking and initiatives – the 'vulnerable' child may also be the 'anti-social' child

## Tackling anti-social behaviour –Learning from experience

- working with children and young people through play and leisure is an effective way of reaching isolated and hard-to-reach parents and carers
- requires sustainable funding for long term impact and social sustainability.

### **Addressing isolation and exclusion of young people in need of health care services. The Church Street Counselling and Art Therapy Project – Folkstone, Kent.**

The project started in September 2004 and provides a counselling and arts therapy service to young people in Folkstone. It developed in response to a growing concern about the lack of existing provision in the area to meet the needs of young people with a range of behavioural problems. The average waiting time for young people to be referred to services connected with the Primary Health Trust is six months, and only those who meet a strict criteria, are offered treatment. Funded from a variety of local charitable sources and businesses, the project mainly receives referrals via local schools, child/family liaison officers, social workers, families and in some cases self referrals.

Often those referred to the project exhibit a multiplicity of behavioural problems and poor social skills and many of them already have received an anti-social behaviour order.

The project aims to provide a range of activities, which will help them to develop more positive ways of communicating and to acquire a wider range of positive social skills. The aim is not to simply manage or contain their behaviour, but rather to understand and uncover the activating events, which have often caused conflict in their lives and subsequent behavioural patterns.

This might include issues of neglect, family breakdowns, some form of abuse or trauma. The project focuses on using art-therapy to assist and explore communication and patterns of behaviour, focussing on change and the development of more effective ways of communicating and interacting. Teaching victims empathy and self-worth are also important factors in the work.

The project has received very positive feedback from both clients and referral agencies and has already proved an effective additional resource to tackling anti-social behaviour locally. Its success has been in providing an environment which is non-threatening to young people, a tailored made package of support and methods which help young people achieve long-term change.

**Joining up local services to tackle anti-social behaviour, the challenge in Leeds.**

In Leeds, the council has developed local area based anti-social behaviour panels covering local divisional policing boundaries, as part of its Anti-Social Behaviour Unit.

The panels adopt a multi-agency, problem-solving approach to local issues of concern, sharing information and targeting resources at diversionary activity alongside enforcement activity. Importantly, the Unit's approach has been developed as a 'strategy for Leeds' and not just a strategy for the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit. The strategy is strongly integrated with other council services including social services and the youth service and all of the relevant agencies are signed up to addressing the problems identified in local action plans. Future plans include creating more mixed teams including staff from the Youth Offending Team, Police and social services.

**Improving service delivery to tackle anti-social behaviour. Mainstreaming Neighbourhood Warden in Hastings.**

In Hastings, the council has developed a successful warden scheme comprising five community wardens, 11 street wardens, four park rangers and three dog wardens, which it says 'provide the eyes and ears of the town working together to achieve a cleaner, safer and greener community'. There are dedicated warden teams located in priority areas along with a roving service that covers non-priority wards.

Each of the teams provide a unique and tailored response to local concerns and works with a range of different agencies and organisations in their patch to provide higher levels of visibility and community reassurance, help build community cohesion and reduce anti-social behaviour. The scheme has been extremely successful so far. The Council reports overall crime is down by 6.9% and in early 2004 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister awarded a Quality Standard Award.

## **Summary findings**

The key findings from our study visits on tackling anti-social behaviour indicate:

- Local authorities along with their partner agencies are responding positively to the challenges of anti-social behaviour. However, developing effective local partnership arrangements is taking time and many of these arrangements are still evolving. Roles and responsibilities within such partnerships need to be clearly defined and a common understanding of the problem agreed.
- There is an over-emphasis on enforcement options and the top-down approach of central government has not been helpful. Local authorities and other agencies need flexibility to develop their own solutions and should be actively encouraged to include interventions and preventions such as mediation, counselling/therapy and community diversion programmes as part of their strategy to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- Furthermore, strategies for tackling anti-social behaviour need to be developed within the context of tackling social exclusion, poverty and addressing community cohesion issues at a local level.
- Strategies which seek to involve and empower the community are not only proving extremely positive in tackling anti-social behaviour, but they are also helping to reduce people's fear of crime and strengthen community cohesion at a local level.

## Useful Contacts

Anti Social Behaviour Unit  
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Website: [www.together.gov.uk](http://www.together.gov.uk)

Committee for Children UK  
Website: [www.cfchildren.org.uk](http://www.cfchildren.org.uk)  
Tel: 07958 654951 (general information line only)

Community Development Foundation  
60 Highbury Grove  
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Website: [www.cdf.org.uk](http://www.cdf.org.uk)

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Website: [www.howardleague.org](http://www.howardleague.org)

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Website: [www.mediationuk.org.uk](http://www.mediationuk.org.uk)

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169 Clapham Road  
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National Community Safety Network  
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