

Final Report on Positive Approaches

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Introduction

The Thames Valley Partnership has co-ordinated the Positive Approaches Alliance for the last two years following on from our Mending Fences programme which promoted a range of positive interventions in anti-social behaviour. During the course of this work we identified that there were other organisations who shared similar views about anti-social behaviour and who were keen to ensure that a careful and considered approach to anti-social behaviour, which stresses the opportunities of positive intervention, should have a voice at a time when the debate had become increasingly polarised.

The Thames Valley Partnership secured a small amount of further funding from the Nuffield Foundation to develop the Mending Fences work after the first three years and to set up the Positive Approaches Alliance. Funding effectively came to an end six months ago but the Thames Valley Partnership has continued to keep together an alliance of organisations and facilitated communication.

John Hedge is leaving the Thames Valley Partnership on retirement with effect from the end of September and the Thames Valley Partnership does not have the capacity to continue with this work, although we continue to believe that liaison between like minded organisations provides opportunities to voice our shared concerns in a more effective way than any one of us can do individually. We therefore approached NACRO in the hope that they would feel able to continue to co-ordinate the Alliance but, although they are clearly leaders in this field and already well known on the national stage, they declined to take over the ongoing co-ordination of the Alliance itself. This paper is therefore a short report on the work that we have done, and a review of the current trends in the anti-social behaviour world. The attached appendix shows case examples which we used to prepare the Positive Approaches briefing paper and a list of contacts of the agencies and individuals involved.

We hope that this final report will help organisations to collaborate in the future if opportunities arise.

I would like to pay particular thanks and tribute to John Hedge whose commitment to this work has gone well beyond the call of duty! John has maintained a profile for Mending Fences and for Positive Approaches beyond the original remit of the project and is well known across the country as a champion of a considered and positive approach to anti-social behaviour, sharing his knowledge with practitioners, managers, elected members and politicians over the last two years.

Sue Raikes OBE
Chief Executive
Thames Valley Partnership

1. Conferences and events

As well as the initiatives taken within member agencies to promote the policies of Positive Approaches, a number of specific events and workshops have been undertaken in the past two years. The main ones are as follows:

- Day long mini-conference within the National Community Safety Network Convention - Portsmouth
- Workshop session at MIND Annual Conference - Bournemouth
- Workshop session at Social Landlords Crime and Nuisance Group Conference, NEC, Birmingham.
- Panel at Westminster Briefing Conference on ASB.
- Presentation at LGIU event on ASB in London.
- Workshop at the LGA Conference, Harrogate.
- Presentation and workshop with Warwickshire County Council Scrutiny Committee.
- Contribution to the launch of the Runnymede Trust's Report, 'Equal Respect'.
- Panel session at the CRE Westminster Conference around diversity and anti-social behaviour.

2. Publications and Parliamentary Activity

The Positive Approaches 10-point plan was published in 2007 and widely circulated to member organisations and at conferences. It was written as a Parliamentary briefing and through the All Party Justice Unions Group was made available to Parliamentarians in both houses.

A follow up case examples paper was prepared using material from Positive Approaches agencies (see Appendix).

Thames Valley Partnership and National Community Safety Network produced a report on the practitioner perspective, which is still available on the NCSN web site. This report was used as the basis for discussions with the Home Office.

Sarah Isal's report on Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, 'Equal Respect' for the Runnymede Trust and launched in October 2006 was supported by Mending Fences – with funding from the Nuffield Foundation. The report raised fundamental concerns about the lack of data to assess the impact of ASBOs on the BME population, and this issue has since been strongly pursued by Runnymede through parliamentary questions and meetings with ministers and officials.

A guidance paper for Probation staff on ASB was produced and widely circulated.

3. Media contributions

Individual agencies have made a range of contributions, and there have been a number of interviews on local and national radio, most frequently in response to a local example of anti-social behaviour practice. Typical was the television interview for Look North, which carried a success story about the impact of an ASBO on a young man, whose life was said to have been completely turned round by the order. It was possible to make the point that he had also been given huge amounts of support precisely because agencies in an area where ASBOs were used sparingly had enough time to do the job properly. This was a recurring theme in interviews. An advantage of Positive Approaches' position on ASBOs was that you could make the case for prevention and conflict resolution while not being just 'anti-ASBO.' Recently an article about Positive approaches was published in 'Barrister Magazine.'

4. So what?..... and so what next?

Assessing the impact of campaigns is always difficult. Our activity, while quite focused was small-scale and inevitably reactive. The Respect Unit maintained a strong national emphasis on enforcement, continually endorsed by the Prime Minister and Home Secretary.

Within the Community Safety field itself there was always a substantial measure of support for the Positive Approaches view, and one achievement of the campaign has certainly been to support agencies and professionals trying to develop a balanced approach to anti-social behaviour. Similarly as individual agencies and collaborating together as Positive Approaches we have been able to brief sympathetic parliamentarians. The Runnymede Trust continues to work at the issues raised in 'Equal Respect'.

The central drive on enforcement has been so strong and strident that in the longer run, and especially with a change of Prime Minister, there was bound to be a counter current. While David Cameron may have had little political benefit from his comments about 'hoodies', the position was brave and significant in suggesting that as a society we could not indefinitely problematise and punish young people without causing longer-term tensions and resentments. The shift of the Respect Unit into the Children's Ministry and the most recent government commitment to a substantial expansion of the Youth Service are both indications of an emerging change of emphasis, and hopefully further change of policy will follow. Indeed on 28th July, Ed Balls, Children's Secretary was quoted in The Guardian as follows:-

"It's a failure every time a young person gets an ASBO. It's necessary – but it's not right. I want to live in the kind of society that puts ASBOs behind us. It is about parents taking their responsibilities seriously. It is about kids having interesting things to do and it is about young people having respect for the society in which they live".

It seems, therefore, that change really may be coming.

On the 'down side' the collapse of Mediation UK as a national voice for Community Mediation has been a serious blow. Although it is quite clear from up and down the

country that Mediation can be a really important contributor to tackling anti-social behaviour, most community mediation schemes still struggle for money, and sustainability is a major issue. As the 'climate' is beginning to change on anti-social behaviour then there are also some important changes in community safety and local structures which will have a big impact. Some of these are:

- Neighbourhood Policing potentially implemented in a way which involves local people and empowers them to intervene earlier with problem solving approaches.
- The new and enhanced role of Councillors not only in Neighbourhood Policing, but in Scrutiny Committees which will give Community Safety a much higher profile in local government.
- The wider engagement agenda, which can also tackle the inter-generational tensions underlying a good deal of the popular anxiety about anti-social behaviour.
- The emergence of a national debate about early intervention and the responsibility respectively of parents and the state when things go wrong. In the longer run what should be the place of enforcement in such matters as parenting and childcare?

Clearly there is a great deal more to be done, and a number of organisations are already taking on the key issues. NACRO has been particularly strong on the anti-social behaviour agenda in recent times, and Runnymede's latest research paper on the Respect Agenda is a very thoughtful challenge to some of the established ideas about language, citizenship and ideas about acceptable behaviour. MIND is planning to undertake research on anti-social behaviour, and more locally the Elmore Team in Oxford is beginning a research project into the impact of ASBOs on clients with multiple problems including mental health.

So the balance may be changing, and hopefully Positive Approaches has made some contribution to that. There is though a long way to go, and even if Positive Approaches cannot be sustained as a co-ordinated group, it would make sense for at least those organisations who have been involved, to keep in touch with each other and maximise any opportunities to put over the shared case.

APPENDIX

Material for briefing paper for Parliamentarians on Positive Approaches

Positive Approaches

We are an alliance of organisations with a wide range of practical experience and expertise, united in a campaign to shift government policy away from a long standing preoccupation with enforcement options on anti-social behaviour and towards a greater priority for preventive and community based solutions. In November 2006 our briefing paper was circulated to Parliamentarians. This note gives further examples from around the country of the success of such approaches.

Warnings work

The recent NAO report on anti-social behaviour pointed to the high cost of ASBOs and the low cost of many alternatives. It particularly quoted the success of well - organised warning schemes. In Carmarthenshire for example a two stage system of warning letters. Of 111 first - stage letters issued in the year up to September 2006 this action was sufficient in over 90% of cases and only 8 second stage letters were needed. This allows resources and intensive work to be concentrated on the cases where this is needed, and local inter-agency ASB groups co-operate on action plans to deal with individual cases.

Positive Approaches argues that schemes like this should be available everywhere and the aim should be to reduce the use of ASBOs, not increase it.

Floating Support in Morpeth

Barnabas, a church based project, received funding from the Communities against Drugs initiative, to support young people at risk by getting them into accommodation and working to help them keep it. They helped them tackle their problems and they also worked with neighbours to ensure that their concerns over ASB were met. The ASB Officer worked with the project to make sure that the young people were aware of the enforcement options if they did not co-operate - as a result most of them did, and an evaluation of the work showed impressive results.

Positive Approaches argues that schemes like this need to be in place across the country, helping to reduce the back door route to custody caused by poorly targeted ASBOs.

Education plus Partnership equals Prevention

Mersey Travel with other partners, including the Police, Fire and Rescue, and transport providers run 'Your Choice' Conferences aimed at Years 6 to 8 in schools, The Conferences help young people think about the risks of ASB and the role of emergency services. Art, music and drama are used to involve students in working out the consequences of ASB.

In West Berkshire a group of agencies and schools have worked with the Fire and Rescue Service to use the visual art of students in developing young people's awareness about the impact of hoax telephone calls. The project, supported by Vodafone, had a dramatic impact on the rate of hoax calls.

Positive Approaches points to the success of partnerships like these in reducing ASB and argues for such approaches to be extended nationwide.

Breaking the cycle requires intensive work

The national children's charity, NCH argues that much more needs to be done to tackle root causes, rather than focusing primarily on punishment. In a response to the National Audit Office report Clare Tickell, it's Chief Executive, called for Individual Support Orders, (ISOs) which involve planned work to tackle young people's drug or violence problems, to be much more widely used. Only 30 have been made since their introduction in May 2003. When intensive work is done with the most difficult young people she pointed out that it can reduce bad behaviour in a high proportion of cases.

A case example from NACRO in Leicester gives the same message about intensive and focused work. A 13 year old boy, who came from a troubled family on the brink of eviction by the city council, was causing serious ASB. He was disruptive in school, including violent attacks on other pupils and teachers, and he had little support from his parents. The New Start for Families project worked intensively with him and his family, so that he resumed education, began to take part in constructive activities, and stayed out of trouble.

The Home Office has helped to fund a number of schemes like this one, and the results seem overall to be very encouraging. They can save longer-term costs and can turn round lives. Positive Approaches says that focused work with families is an essential preventive approach and needs to be made available across the country.

Young People respond to well planned work.

The Youth Service can play a major part in reducing ASB. In Leeds the service works with 16,000 young people in 450 programmes. They have involved young people in work with film making; inter-generational environmental work, and involved them in steering and managing their own projects such as the Garforth Skate Park. The Service's REVIZIT programme takes on young people referred from other agencies. Its targets are those on ABCs, Final warnings and even ASBOs. Up to 12 weekly sessions are used to look intensively at attitudes, behaviour and consequences. Results from this pilot project are very encouraging.

In Monmouth and Torfaen the view was taken that ASB offenders need to be given a clear choice - behave or face an ASBO. They introduced a Prevention Intervention Programme (PIP), which takes referrals from the Youth Offending Team and other services. After assessment and a case conference an individual action plan is drawn up, which covers all the factors behind the ASB - alcohol or drugs, lack of parental support, need for training

and so on. The scheme has been supported by the Welsh Assembly, and has meant that the area has needed very few ASBOs. This means that the ASBO has been kept for the small number who will not co-operate, keeping it as an important final sanction. As the project's report says 'Record numbers of ASBOs should be an issue for concern not a pleasing statistic'.

Preventive work can be very locally based and very creative. In Berinsfield, South Oxfordshire, local Police and Youth Workers have set up a scheme which involves young people at risk in activity to support the Noah's Ark charity, working to support a day centre in Kenya. Those who complete their involvement can be selected to work at the project in Kenya, and for many this has been a life changing experience.

Positive Approaches argues that we need to take the best practice from around the country and apply it everywhere, so that there is no longer a postcode lottery over access to preventive work. Targets should not be about increasing ASBOs, but reducing overall numbers so that they are used only when absolutely necessary.

Resolving Conflict, promoting agreement.

Much ASB comes from arguments and conflict, which has escalated over time. This can apply to neighbours, schools, inter-generational tensions, or even hostility between whole communities. Community mediation schemes around the country have shown that they can have a major impact in up to 80% of the cases referred to them. They are relatively low cost and solutions tend to 'stick' because they are agreed rather than imposed from outside.

In Southwark the Community Mediation Centre involves young people directly in resolving community conflicts, often at a serious level involving violence and weapons. They receive training in mediation techniques, and are role models for young people in a diverse and challenging area of central London.

In Slough the Aikh Saath project works for similar results and with similar success. In Milton Keynes a Community mediation scheme project demonstrated that young people who learn about mediation techniques in school can be involved as well in the wider community.

Since much of the misery of ASB stems from conflict and misunderstanding, or fear about the activity of other people Mediation should be an essential resource in any ASB strategy. In reality up and down the country mediation schemes struggle to survive financially. Positive Approaches argues that the Respect Unit needs to ensure access everywhere to mediation so that people can be helped to tackle their own problems.

Poorly targeted ASBOs can cause other problems.

The National Audit office report pointed to the high breach rate of ASBOs and their cost. For some groups, such as those with mental health problems the breach rate can be very high and the consequences severe. The Elmore Team in Oxford, reports several such cases.

'Ami' has been diagnosed as having 'personality disorder' and after experiencing racist bullying at work she became depressed and violent towards her mother, leading to her leaving home. Her behaviour worsened and an ASBO was made prohibiting contact with her mother. She came to Elmore's attention during her third sentence for breaching the ASBO. They gave her support on release, but her behaviour problems began again. A number of agencies became involved and Elmore argued that a secure psychiatric environment was the best option for her. Eventually, and after a long struggle this happened.

Research undertaken by NAPO, a member of the Positive Approaches Alliance, found that a significant number of ASBOs had been poorly targeted, or unrealistically framed. In many cases the support needed to help people change their behaviour was simply not there. The Runnymede Trust in its recent research report showed that no information is systematically collected about race and ASBOs. We do not know whether in this critical area of social policy they are helping or hindering.

We do know that ASBOs can work well, but only where there is good planning and implementation. South Kesteven District Council publicised the success of Craig Brackenbury in a news report in December 2006. He had been given an ASBO and had turned his life round, changing his behaviour, and sharing his experiences to help other young people. He now plans to resume his studies. Craig attributes his success to the support of his mother, but also the constant communication between him and the Community Safety Team. Clearly this support and interest have been key factors in this case, but nationally there is little awareness of 'what works' in making an ASBO successful.

Positive Approaches is not against ASBOs. They are a vital final option when serious behaviour has to be controlled. However there is much evidence of poor use of them, leading to high breach rates. Positive Approaches argues that alongside an emphasis on properly resourced prevention and conflict resolution there needs to be an urgent and detailed review of ASBOs so that we can learn properly from experience and avoid the unforeseen consequences of poor ASB use, and the current huge variation in use from area to area.

Those involved in the Thames Valley Partnership Positive Approaches Group

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