This paper summarises some of the key policies and related issues that will inform the work of the SHOUT project in Oxfordshire. It provides some analysis of these policies and reviews their implementation in Oxfordshire. It is offered by the project evaluators to provide some context for those responsible for delivering the work on five estates.

SHOUT is a youth and community work project delivered by Spurgeons on five of Oxford Citizens Housing Association estates in Oxfordshire. It is designed to generate respect between young and old. Funders include the Innovation and Good Practice Unit of the Housing Corporation, Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford Citizens Housing Association.

1. Antisocial Behaviour and Community Safety

Antisocial behaviour legislation was first introduced in the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act and has since become a central concern of community safety and the work of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs). There remains no clear or agreed definition and as a result, monitoring of the impact of any legislation, or the effectiveness of any intervention is patchy.

It is clear however that many communities express concerns about antisocial behaviour; and in particular associate antisocial behaviour with young people visible on the streets, without parental supervision, sometimes accompanied by rowdy behaviour, nuisance or criminal damage. A Home Office survey in 2005 found that 29% of young people reported being involved in antisocial behaviour. Such concerns are not new and community consultations and surveys over the decades have identified similar issues. What is new is the label and response, which the legislation has provided.

The implementation of the legislation was surrounded by tough sounding rhetoric with a strong emphasis on enforcement, troublesome families and the need to support victims who would “take a stand” against those causing disruption or fear in local communities.

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1 Home Office 2005, Young people, crime and antisocial behaviour: findings from the 2003 Crime and Justice Survey – Findings 245 by Ruth Hayward and Clare Sharp
Examples tended to focus on inner city areas and often on relatively serious antisocial behaviour, or even crime; but the solutions and the mechanisms for dealing with it are held up as relevant to all communities. However research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) suggests that antisocial behaviour has little or no bearing on the majority of the population and two thirds of people favour preventive action over tough action against perpetrators of antisocial behaviour.\(^2\) There is some evidence that, as antisocial behaviour has risen in prominence, levels of tolerance have gone down but the research suggests that there are significant variations in attitudes and tolerance.

Anti-social behaviour related evictions are increasing in areas of social housing especially in supported housing tenures (see section 3, below) suggesting that social housing residents are more likely to be exposed to anti-social behaviour than others.

Although Housing Corporation guidance encourages a carrot and stick approach\(^3\), Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) along with local authorities have been encouraged to see Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) as a measure of success and initially received little encouragement for prevention.

There remains huge variation in the use of the legislation by local authorities and RSLs, with some areas championing the use of ASBOs as an initial response and others promoting programmes of prevention with enforcement used only as a last resort.

In Oxfordshire, district councils lead antisocial behaviour enforcement whereas the Youth Offending Service (YOS) sits within the County Council. This means that it is possible for a young person to receive an ASBO and end up in custody following a breach without having had any contact with the YOS prevention team and support staff whose task is to try and prevent young people needing to be detained. This anomaly may be resolved through the proposed new county wide safer community arrangements linked to the Local Area Agreement. In Oxford City, the Council’s Crime and Nuisance Action Team (CANAcT) already works closely with the YOS and local youth groups to support the prevention agenda.

It is difficult to measure the effectiveness of ASBOs because the data has not been monitored effectively or consistently. For example, it is not possible to find out if people from Black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds are disproportionately given ASBOs or whether antisocial behaviour legislation has been successful in tackling racial harassment. In a report for the Runnymede Trust, Sarah Isal argues that there has been intense pressure from government to use instruments such as ASBOs without any evidence that they work.\(^4\)

Despite ongoing public anxiety about anti-social behaviour, it appears that public perception is changing: the Home Office website states that ‘the number of people who think ASB is a big or fairly big problem has reduced from 20.7% in 2002/03 to 16.7% at the end of 2004. (Source: British Crime Survey)’\(^5\)

\(^3\) Housing Corporation 2004, *Protecting Our communities: How housing associations are tackling anti-social behaviour*
\(^5\) www.homeoffice.gov.uk/anti-social-behaviour
2. Respect

The Home Office established the Respect Task Force in September 2005. It was supposed to represent a shift towards prevention and introduce individual support packages and preventive work with families alongside the focus on enforcement. The original aim of the Task Force was ‘promoting respect, responsibility, supporting Neighbourhood Policing and helping communities to set their own standards of behaviour.’

A National Action Plan was published in January 2006 to ‘build on the drive to tackle anti-social behaviour and reclaim communities for the law-abiding majority. It explains why there is a need to deepen the approach by tackling the underlying causes of anti-social behaviour, intervening early where problems occur and broadening efforts to address other areas of poor behaviour.’

Based on the findings from the 2005 CDRP survey, the task force promoted firm action to stop unacceptable behaviour and longer-term investment in addressing underlying causes as part of the Respect Agenda. This was closely followed in April 2006 by the creation of Respect Academies to promote new ways of working to drive up standards of behaviour, improve family support and parenting skills and crack down on antisocial behaviour. In August, the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published a Respect Standard for Housing Management. The Housing Corporation also emphasised the importance of engaging and empowering communities by promoting the Respect Agenda.

A survey of CDRPs in January 2007 found that there had been a substantial increase in the use of both court related powers (such as ASBOs and injunctions) and voluntary agreements such as Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs). The Housing Corporation then issued guidance on how to work with CDRPs and others to promote the Respect agenda.

Research by the Runnymede Trust suggests that the Respect Agenda has been widely criticised as being narrowly focussed and unable to reflect the needs or interests of particular groups especially BME communities.

In July 2007 the Respect Taskforce was moved into the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and then disbanded altogether and replaced by the Youth Taskforce. The focus is now on early intervention and preventive work with young people. It is not clear where the lead for parenting support now lies though funding for family intervention has been confirmed.

The emphasis of the Youth Taskforce on prevention and the close ties with the wider remit of the DCSF is to be welcomed. However, the reorganisation has left a lack of clarity over the government agenda on Respect and who is leading it.

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7 DCLG 2006, Housing and antisocial behaviour: a guide for residents
8 Housing Corporation 2006, Neighbourhoods and Communities Strategy
9 Housing Corporation 2007, Good Practice Note: Promoting Respect
10 Runnymede 2007, The State of the Nation: Respect as a Justification for Policy by Omar Khan
3. Housing Management

Government and Housing Corporation guidance has linked housing management very closely to the Respect Agenda most obviously through the Respect Standard for Housing Management. The Police and Criminal Justice Act 2006 enabled social landlords to apply for Antisocial Behaviour Injunctions (ASBIs). RSLs and local authorities were also given the power to enter into parenting contracts and apply for parenting orders (linked to information and guidance) where antisocial behaviour is the trigger.

A recent study looks at how RSLs are making use of these and other powers. It found that most antisocial behaviour involves minor misconduct such as noise and that there is no evidence that underlying rates of misconduct are rising. It also found that Acceptable Behaviour Contracts are widely regarded as ‘a quick, cheap and effective way of tackling youth disorder’. In 2005/06, 79% of housing associations made use of a legal power with possession being the most widely exercised. Injunctions are preferred to ASBOs as they are simpler to execute. Antisocial behaviour evictions in general needs housing account for 7% of all evictions whereas in supported housing the equivalent figure is 40%. Overall housing association evictions fell by 6% in 2005/06 but antisocial behaviour evictions rose by 10%. The study also found that housing associations are very active in preventive actions and mediation work but this gets less attention and profile.

4. Housing Development and Regeneration

In the 1990’s the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) provided long-term funding for regeneration efforts in major centres of deprivation. The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and New Deal for Communities reflected the Labour Government’s commitment to major structural change and the Policy Action Teams advising the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit created a broad agenda for change based on greater community involvement and empowerment. Extensive research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that the impact of this agenda on poverty and worklessness in deprived areas has been limited. The latest of their reports on the subject points to

- Half of children in poverty are still in working families.
- Overall poverty levels in 2006 were the same as in 2002.
- Child poverty in 2006 was still 500,000 higher than the target set for 2005.
- Overall earnings inequalities are widening.
- Disability rather than lone parenthood is the factor most likely to lead to worklessness.

In 2004, the Social Exclusion Unit’s own assessment confirmed that progress on key issues such as worklessness was negligible. These funding streams have now been closed down and some ongoing regeneration activity has been funded through the Oxford Area Programme.

Meanwhile the South East Plan has set non-negotiable and ambitious targets for new housing developments in Oxfordshire with an emphasis on mixed, private and social...
housing. Affordable housing is a high priority in the new Sustainable Community Strategy for the county and in the Oxfordshire Rural Framework. A new Oxfordshire Housing Partnership has been charged by the Public Service Board (the delivery agent for the Local Strategic Partnership) to help deliver affordable housing targets in the next Local Area Agreement. Most development will remain within the brief of the district and city councils, which are the housing and planning authorities.

Planning and urban design is seen as important in building communities with resilience to crime and in promoting community cohesion. Much of the responsibility for this obviously lies with the housing and planning authorities but the Housing Corporation is keen to encourage RSLs to contribute to local strategies and to the sustainability of communities by ‘extending beyond their core housing role’.14

5. Every Child Matters

Every Child Matters heralded a significant change in policy and practice in relation to children. The five outcomes stress the importance of inclusion of young people in society both for their own good and in the interests of society, the economy and the future. They are:

- Stay Safe
- Be Healthy
- Enjoy and Achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

The Common Assessment Framework introduces a multi-agency approach to information sharing and the identification of risk. It is proving difficult to implement in some areas because of the complexity of adapting entrenched incompatible systems.

The Children’s Act 2004 created Children’s Trusts to bring together responsibilities for education, health and safeguarding of children. In Oxfordshire this has led to the incorporation of the Youth Offending Service, the Youth Support Service and services for ‘looked after’ children into the Children, Young People and Families Directorate. It has also led to the creation of an interagency Children and Young People’s Board, which works to the Children and Young People’s Plan (CYPP). The plan is entering its second year and the following priorities have been identified:

- Preventative and early intervention support for children and families at risk of harm and other harmful outcomes (for example, care, exclusion or truancy from school, offending, drug and alcohol misuse, teenage pregnancy, people not in education, employment or training – NEET).
- Raising the educational aspiration, achievement and enjoyment of all pupils with a particular focus on vulnerable and/or underachieving groups of children and young people. Continue to focus support and intervention to improve Oxfordshire’s attainment in relation to statistical neighbours.
- Improving sexual health, reducing unwanted teenage conceptions and improving support for teenage parents.
- Strengthening support to improve the emotional and mental health/wellbeing of all children and young people thereby reducing the incidence of behaviour difficulties, conduct disorders, mental health difficulties; with particular focus on tackling the problem of bullying.

14 Housing Corporation 2006, Neighbourhoods and Communities Strategy

SHOUT Policy Context Review December 2007
• Improving outcomes for children, young people and families in areas of deprivation including rural deprivation/isolation.
• Ongoing engagement and participation of children, young people and families in the development of services.

Of particular interest, is the ongoing emphasis on early intervention and prevention as well as engagement and participation. There is a growing realisation in the county that the notion of ‘enjoy’ has been lost beneath attempts to improve outcomes under ‘achieve’. A new funding stream is being created within the County Council under the outcome heading ‘enjoy’, which will focus, amongst other things, on enabling children and young people to play and occupy public space.

The second phase of Sure Start re-establishes local authorities at the centre of the delivery of children’s services. Children’s Centres and the early lessons from Sure Start make a link between early intervention for children and the development of skills and employability as a key route out of poverty. Major changes cannot be introduced quickly but Oxfordshire is clearly well ahead in the Thames Valley in the development and roll out of children’s centres across the county.

6. Youth Matters
Following on from Every Child Matters, Youth Matters sets out a plan to ensure all young people have access to purposeful activities and adequate support through what is known as the ‘local offer’. Connexions was for some time the flagship combined service for delivering support and advice to young people; this service has now been dismantled and, as with children’s services, young people’s services are now placed firmly within the scope of the local authority through the Children’s Trust arrangements. This presents a massive challenge to the Youth Support Service, which is responsible for designing the local offer, and then ensuring it is delivered through providers from any sector competing in an open market. This is a new world for the voluntary and maintained youth sector but, paradoxically, represents a return to universal provision with targeted support.

The growing emphasis on positive activities is reinforced by Parliament’s Public Accounts Committee, which criticised lack of coordination and poor monitoring of enforcement activity and suggested greater use of positive interventions. A recent study published in October 2007 suggests that reward schemes for pro-social behaviour can be very effective in promoting volunteering and dealing with antisocial behaviour. The audit commission has just launched a programme to consider the role and value for money of local authorities in coordinating youth provision and its impact on antisocial behaviour.

\[15\] DCSF and HM Treasury 2007, *Aiming High for Young People: A 10 Year Strategy for Positive Activities*  
\[17\] JRF 2007, *Rewarding young people for pro-social behaviour: an evaluation of two initiatives to reward young people* by Julia Hirst, Eleanor Formby, Sadie Parr, Judy Nixon, Caroline Hunter and John Flint  
\[18\] Audit Commission, *Youth Sport Leisure and Antisocial Behaviour* - due to report in Autumn 2008
7. Neighbourhood Policing

Neighbourhood Policing was introduced by the Home Office in 2004 as a response to calls for locally based, visible officers on the streets responding to local concerns. Thames Valley Police are committed to a roll out of the model by April 2008. This involves establishing Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs) with representation from community organisations and local people to meet regularly with the police to identify concerns and implement solutions.

Community Safety Partnerships, which pre-dated the current CDRPs, were intended to be responsive to local concerns. The statutory framework introduced by the Crime and Disorder Act means that the work of the new statutory CDRPs is driven primarily by government priorities and performance targets. Neighbourhood policing, however, has the potential to re-engage and empower local people to determine policing priorities and community safety solutions. At best, neighbourhood policing can provide an effective forum for responding to antisocial behaviour. In some areas however it is still heavily police led and there is a concern that it duplicates or cuts across other effective channels. In the Thames Valley, about one-third of NAGs are still chaired or led directly by Thames Valley Police rather than by community leaders or champions. It is extremely rare for young people to be involved in NAGs even though young people are often the main cause for concern at NAG meetings. This is recognised by Oxfordshire NAG chairs and the police who are looking for creative ways of involving children and young people in identifying and addressing local concerns.

An audit commission report in May 2006 reported that neighbourhood approaches are now a high priority but that crime reduction is still not tailored to neighbourhoods and that local authorities need to improve how they record disorder and encourage more sharing of information.

8. Volunteering

The Government has been actively promoting volunteering for the last five years initially through Millennium Volunteers, a scheme designed to widen participation in volunteering across a range of areas of activity. The Russell Commission promoted volunteering amongst young people and the proposals from these two organisations has now created a new charity “V“ aimed specifically at young people as potential volunteers. The Russell Commission report recommends a step change in youth volunteering in the UK and responds to ‘the clearly expressed desire of young people to find meaningful ways of contributing to their communities’: It addresses current inconsistencies and weaknesses in provision, which prevent the full potential of youth volunteering opportunities from being realised, as well as identifying ways to engage more young people from disadvantaged and under-represented communities. Additionally, the Commission proposes measures to significantly improve the range and quality of activities for which young people can choose to volunteer.

There has also been an increased focus on consultation with children and young people and attempts to actively engage them in creating solutions for themselves and their

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19 Home Office 2004, Building Communities, Beating Crime: a better police service for the 21st century
20 Audit Commission 2006, Neighbourhood Crime and Antisocial Behaviour: Making places safer through improved local working
21 www.wearev.com and www.volunteering.org.uk
22 Russell Commission 2005, A national framework for youth action and engagement commissioned by the Cabinet Office
communities. This work originates from the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child and is being led nationally by the Children’s Commissioner, Professor Sir Al Aynsley-Green. In Oxfordshire, the Children’s Fund focuses on hearing the voices of young people themselves and there is a strong track record of this in the county. The Oxfordshire Children and Young People Involvement Network (ChYPIN) includes a Sounding Board of children and young people that meet regularly with leaders of the Children’s Trust and has representation on the Children and Young People’s Board. Participation is now accepted as a core element of the Trust arrangements.

9. Community Cohesion
Cohesion became a hot topic in 2001. During that summer there were disturbances in several towns in the north of England between young people – particular from white and Asian ethnic groups. Following this, the Home Secretary established the Community Cohesion Review Team under Ted Cantle. The team produced a detailed report into the issues behind such disturbances and outlined a national strategy to tackle them. A number of funding streams now focus on community cohesion and also recognise the importance of intergenerational tensions. Faith communities are seen by the government as having a greater part to play in promoting community cohesion.  

This agenda is also adopted by the Housing Corporation in its recently published community cohesion strategy in which it confirms the need for RSLs to actively promote cohesion and integration through partnership working, investment decisions, neighbourhood shaping, resident empowerment, wider community engagement and myth busting.

10. A footnote on alcohol
Alongside the sudden demise of the Respect Taskforce has been the quiet arrival of a newly formed Antisocial Behaviour and Alcohol Unit in the Home Office Crime and Drugs Directorate. There is growing concern nationally about alcohol misuse, which has not attracted anything like the investment, which has been given to tackling illegal drugs. The concerns relate to health and wider cultural issues as well as antisocial behaviour and criminality. In Oxfordshire, the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) is preparing a young people’s substance misuse strategy, which will, for the first time, have a discrete section on alcohol. A recent meeting of over 100 children and young people as part of Oxfordshire’s ChYPIN identified alcohol as a burning issue. Strategic Assessments by the CDRPs are showing alcohol as a top concern and Oxfordshire Local Strategic Partnership is expected to include alcohol as a key issue in its Sustainable Communities Strategy and therefore its Local Area Agreement negotiations with government, which will be completed by March 2008.

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24 Housing Corporation 2007, Shared Places: Community Cohesion Strategy
11. Balance between prevention and enforcement
The SHOUT project needs to be alert to the ongoing pressure from government and certain sections of the public, including RSL residents, for strong enforcement interventions to tackle perceived antisocial behaviour. The Housing Corporation has endorsed close working with CDRPs and others in order to support the Respect Taskforce Agenda, which is essentially about more tools and powers for enforcement.

There is real concern about unacceptable behaviour especially when related to alcohol misuse by young people and the need to ensure that the victims of antisocial behaviour receive swift resolution. It is important, therefore, that the project retains good links with those bodies that can enforce when necessary.

However there is also a growing acceptance that enforcement can only be part of the solution and there is a need to identify ways of intervening early to enable young people to feel included, make a positive contribution and enjoy themselves without being demonised. This too is endorsed by Housing Corporation guidance. The Oxfordshire Play Strategy, the Youth Offending Service prevention agenda and the Youth Support Service positive activities programme all recognise the need to enable children and young people to occupy public space and contribute to public life. There is clear support in Oxfordshire’s Children and Young People’s Plan for initiatives that improve intergenerational understanding, tolerance, active citizenship and the participation of children and young people in decision-making. This is reflected in the recent emphasis on positive activities and family intervention from DCFS.

The policy environment is confusing and changing. In that context, it is important that the project seeks the right balance between preventive work supporting children and young people to be positive and enforcement action to hold a line with the wider community about what kinds of behaviour are acceptable.

The SHOUT project is working at a very interesting time in terms of policy development and has the potential to inform thinking locally and nationally. We strongly advise that the project links closely with key local partners including the YOS, the local councils and Thames Valley Police to ensure operational effectiveness and strategic relevance.

We also advise that the project engages in the national debate through the running of seminars for practitioners, policy makers and academics and disseminating the findings of the project.

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Glossary

ABC  Acceptable Behaviour Contract  
ASB  Antisocial Behaviour  
ASBI  Antisocial Behaviour Injunction  
ASBO  Antisocial Behaviour Order  
BME  Black and minority ethnic  
CAF  Common Assessment Framework  
CANAct  Crime and Nuisance Action Team (Oxford City Council)  
CDRP  Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership  
ChYPIN  Children and Young People Involvement Network (Oxfordshire)  
CYP  Children and Young People’s Plan  
DAAT  Drug and Alcohol Action Team  
DCLG  Department of Communities and Local Government  
DCSF  Department for Children, Schools and Families  
ECM  Every Child Matters  
JRF  Joseph Rowntree Foundation  
LAA  Local Area Agreement  
LSP  Local Strategic Partnership  
NAG  Neighbourhood Action Group  
NEET  not in education employment or training  
PSB  Public Service Board  
RSL  Registered Social Landlord  
SRB  Single Regeneration Budget  
YOS  Youth Offending Service

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