

Agenda Item 19

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

1 February 2022

Effective interventions for tackling ASB by the community safety unit

Final Decision-Maker	COMMUNITIES, HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall Director of Regeneration & Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	John Littlemore Head of Housing & Community Services
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

Anti-social behaviour covers a wide spectrum of activity. Research indicates that enforcement alone does not provide the most effective solution but may contribute to the reduction of ASB when set alongside other interventions.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

That:

1. The Community Protection Team work with key partner agencies to adopt a 'Task Force Approach' to reducing ASB and other criminality in the Town Centre, including an increased presence and joint problem solving; and
2. An assessment of the effectiveness of this approach to be presented to Committee in April 2022

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Communities, Housing & Environment Committee	1 February 2022

Effective interventions for tackling ASB by the community safety unit

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place • Accepting the recommendation is intended to materially improve the Council's ability to achieve a safe environment for residents and visitors to enjoy. 	Head of Housing & Community Services
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected 	Head of Housing & Community Services
Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Already covered in the risk section. 	Head of Housing & Community Services
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is proposed to resource the recommended proposal from existing resources. 	Head of Housing & Community Services
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be staffing implications and these are set out in Paragraph 3.3 	Head of Housing & Community Services
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting on the recommendations is within the Council's powers as set out in the Crime & Reduction Act. 	Head of Housing & Community Services

Privacy and Data Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepting the recommendations will increase the volume of data held by the Council. We will hold that data in line with our retention schedules. 	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment 	Head of Housing & Community Services
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals. 	Head of Housing & Community Services
Crime and Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendation is intended to have a positive impact on Crime and Disorder. The Community Protection Team have been consulted and mitigation has been proposed 	Head of Housing & Community Services
Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not applicable 	Head of Housing & Community Services
Biodiversity and Climate Change	<p>The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and are;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no implications on biodiversity and climate change. 	Head of Housing & Community Services

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Chair & Vice Chair of the Communities, Housing & Environment Committee requested officers to provide a report on the effectiveness of the Council's Community Safety Unit in relation to tackling anti-social behaviour; and whether this could be improved through the introduction of additional resources. In particular whether this could be improved by providing a visible presence and deterrent to those committing ASB, and where necessary to enforce the Public Space Protection Orders currently in place within the Borough.
- 2.2 In considering these points research was undertaken to identify areas of good practice that could evidence what types of intervention are most effective in reducing ASB. A number of reports were reviewed and referenced in this report, and acknowledgement is given to their authors in Paragraph 9. below.
- 2.3 The Queen's University of Belfast produced a report on "Understanding and addressing anti-social behaviour" for the Belfast Community Safety

Partnership in 2019. It stated that anti-social behaviour encompasses a broad range of activity and may differ depending on the demographic that witnesses or perpetrates the actions. This captures a spectrum of behaviours from more general, nuisance behaviours that are subjective but generally low risk through to more serious forms of ASB, often referred to as chronic substance misuse, aggression and higher risk behaviours.”

- 2.4 It was noted that “Antisocial behaviours can cause harm and distress to individuals and communities. Community perceptions have a role in perpetuating assumptions about young people, what antisocial behaviour is and what responses are required.”
- 2.5 Our own recent consultation carried out to inform the review of the Community Safety Plan also supports the finding of the Belfast study, that at a lower end of the scale ASB can be very subjective and the geographical location can also affect the person’s perception of what is ASB, as well as the level of tolerance towards the conduct of the perpetrator.
- 2.6 The Community Safety Survey was conducted between 17th September and 31 October 2021. There was a total of 1241 responses to the survey, which was carried out via various social media channels and the Council’s website. Anti-social behaviour was cited as the most single issue of concern by 653 of respondents. However, further analysis of what was being thought of as ASB varied significantly depending on where the respondent lived.
- 2.7 Littering was the main issue of concern ascribed to the definition of ASB, with 76% describing this as a ‘fairly big or very big issue’. Of all respondents, dog-fowling and fly-tipping were all cited within the definition of ASB as being a ‘fairly big or very big issue’ above drunk /rowdy people or young people hanging around.
- 2.8 Overall, 32% of respondents felt that drunk/rowdy people were a ‘fairly big or very big issue’ but this rose to 67% when broken down into the High Street Ward or as low as 4% for Harrietsham & Lenham Ward. Similarly concerns around young people hanging around scored 45% as a ‘fairly big or very big issue’ overall but 57% for High Street Ward and 24% for Harrietsham & Lenham Ward.
- 2.9 Defining what is meant by ASB is important when considering the intervention that may prove to be most effective. As can be seen from the extract from the survey above, what professionals may deem to be the main concern around ASB is not necessarily reflected by the community. Solutions will also need to be nuanced to address the concerns of specific community areas.

2.10 Evidencing the impact of interventions:

The National Audit Office in 2005 commissioned the RAND Europe Institute to evaluate the effectiveness of ASB interventions. The report noted that “There is no strong tradition of rigorous evaluations of interventions in Europe.”

- 2.11 Unfortunately, this position does not appear to have significantly changed, the House of Commons (HoC) library report (April 2020) on "Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour stated "There is no centrally published and accredited data on the use of all ASB powers. Each police force and local authority might have its own records on the use of powers but there is no central authority responsible for collecting and publishing this data at the national level. We therefore do not have an accurate picture of when and how ASB powers are being used or who is being affected by their use across England and Wales." This makes evaluating our own Community Safety Unit approach difficult to evaluate in comparison to other areas, and also in identifying potential best practice.
- 2.12 The HoC report referenced the Crime Statistics for England & Wales (CSEW), noting around 39% of people personally experienced anti-social behaviour in their local area between October 2018 and September 2019. This was an increase from the previous year but the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has said changes in how the survey questions were asked may have contributed to the increase.
- 2.13 In contrast, national Police data shows a decrease in anti-social behaviour over the last ten years. However, it is not clear how much of this decrease can be attributed to police recording practices, as more instances of 'anti-social behaviour' are now being recorded as crime.
- 2.14 The CSEW showed a marked decrease in people's perceptions of anti-social behaviour as a "very big" or "fairly big" problem over the past ten years. Overall, 7% of people thought that "high level anti-social behaviour" was a very/ fairly big problem between October 2018 and September 2019. This is down by almost ten percentage points from ten years ago (from 16% between April 2008 and March 2009).
- 2.15 The advent of the Covid19 pandemic together with the measures taken to address its spread, lead to a sharp increase in reported ASB. This can be attributed to many more people being at home, and also changes in activity that led to complaints round noise and bonfires. This makes data collected from the period post March 2020 difficult to compare against data from previous years.
- 2.16 Whilst some restrictions have been lifted, the long-term impact on people's behaviour and mental health from the unusual set of social impacts brought about by the pandemic and the ensuing restrictions – particularly for young people, has yet to be studied and understood.

2.17 Interventions:

The House of Commons Library report on "Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour April 2020" noted that local authorities and the police lead on tackling anti-social behaviour, but many public, private and social organisations work to prevent and respond to ASB.

- 2.18 The multi-organisation and methodology approach was a common feature across the various studies and reports reviewed during the compilation of the report.

2.19 The 2005 RAND report for the National Audit Office made the following conclusions:

- Early interventions aim to tackle risk factors from pregnancy through to early childhood and have been found to be effective.
- Educational interventions to prevent the onset of offending in at-risk youth can prevent the onset of delinquency.
- Coercive interventions, such as detention and imprisonment, have been found to produce nil or even negative effects in reducing recidivism.
- There is little reliable data on the effectiveness of ASBOs, a type of coercive intervention and a key measure to tackle ASB in the UK.
- Developmental/rehabilitative interventions can significantly reduce the rate of recidivism amongst young offenders.
- Situational interventions that aim to reduce the opportunity to commit crime, for example by improving street lighting, have also been found to be effective.

2.20 The study by the University of Belfast for the Belfast Community Safety Partnership identified that "Coercive interventions such as Anti-social behaviour orders have been widely implemented in recent years but reviews and meta-analysis examining their effectiveness have concluded that these have nil effect on the deterrence of ASB."

2.21 Equally the study noted that if a "community experiences significant, persistent and dangerous forms of ASB then group based, diversionary and activity focused projects appears to be insufficient on their own to have a meaningful impact on behaviour. Policy makers and commissioners need to be aware of the specific forms of ASB which they want to prioritise, but also the specific approaches which are proven to be more effective for those forms of ASB."

2.22 A number of reports concluded that only a minority of young people were engaged in more serious forms of ASB and present a threat to themselves, their peers and their communities. A combination of youth work, family work and therapeutic approaches are often most successful when combined with outreach work and direct engagement.

2.23 Similar findings were found by MVA Consultancy in 2007 when they undertook a study and "Evaluation of Four Anti-Social Behaviour Projects in Wales" on behalf of the Welsh Assembly. This study reviewed four separate projects that had a similar aim of reducing ASB but were different in their approach and delivery.

2.24 One project focused on getting young people more involved in activities that would result in benefits for their community. Another project concentrated on designing out crime through a programme of clean-up activities in the local community, as a first step towards increasing community pride and ownership among residents in the area.

2.25 The third project took a more person-focussed approach, specifically working with an identified cohort of known offenders with the aim of

reducing the number of disaffected young people who carry out anti-social behaviour, as a means of reducing fear of crime in the wider community. The final project reviewed took a more enforcement led intervention, using statutory powers to reduce anti-social behaviour in Cardiff's parks and open spaces.

2.26 The four projects all achieved a degree of success, but it was noted that some required a more blended approach in order to address the negative behaviours of a minority of individuals who exhibited the worst types of behaviour. Some interventions had short-term benefits or had the effect of displacing the problem thus providing a period of relief for the community. However, for there to be a long-term benefit addressing the causation of the behaviour was just as important as enforcement.

2.27 The research of four projects concluded that there was an "inherent assumption that the targeted behaviours would result in reduced levels of fear of crime or increased levels of feelings of safety. Despite this, in each of the projects, it might be argued that the main benefits to arise were for participants' quality of life rather than any notable decrease in communities' fear of crime or feelings of safety. This might suggest, again, a need for greater public consultation at an early stage of project planning to ensure that the activities undertaken are matched to the desired changes. It is recognised that this is a challenging target."

2.28 Maidstone's approach:

The Council has been working together with its partner organisations including Kent Police and Kent County Council to address areas of concern such as Brenchley park. This has included providing diversionary events, engaging with young people through County's youth service, as well as an increase in Police presence over a short-period. This approach seeks to address the behaviour in the short-term but also to assist with tackling the underlying causes of the behaviour over a the long-term.

2.29 The use of the Town Centre PSPO has evolved. When first implemented there were increasing concerns around begging and ASB associated with groups gathering to consume alcohol in public places. Through the joint work with the Outreach Team, many of the individuals who were known to be street homeless and exhibiting this type of behaviour have been assisted to come off the streets.

2.30 This has significantly reduced the number of complaints received around begging and ASB that was attributed to this cohort of people. The effect of the offer of assistance or the use of the PSPO for those who were not minded to accept help, meant that in time not only were those individuals helped and awareness was raised amongst the wider peer group.

2.31 Since the lifting of the lockdown regulations, and with more people socialising in a public setting, other concerns have emerged – particularly around young people gathering in groups; and activity linked to supply and use of illegal substances.

- 2.32 The same approach of warning and informing first is captured in most of the Council's enforcement policies. Most members of the public desist from the activity that is causing concern when requested to do so. This means that a Community Protection Notice or Fixed Penalty Notice is required to be served. Our officers will always seek to resolve situations where they can but their powers are limited. For example, those persons who become belligerent and refuse to provide their details in order that a FPN can be issued may still require the attendance of a police constable to effect an arrest.
- 2.33 Whilst the Community Protection Team has a role to play in disrupting activities linked to illegal substances, it does not have the powers to intervene e.g. to make arrests. In addition, any role that the Council takes in tackling this issue has to be carefully coordinated with the Police so as not to compromise criminal investigations that are being pursued.
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3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Committee could choose to do nothing but this option is not recommended as the Committee has previously expressed a desire to be more interventionist in tackling ASB.
- 3.2 The Committee recently tasked officers to deploy resources from the Community Protection Team to deliver a more visible presence in areas where the Council has an existing Public Space Protection Order. Whilst this can be achieved over the short-term, it would not be possible to sustain diverting resources away from the Team's statutory functions concerning nuisance and licensing without diluting services for residents; and reducing capacity to deliver interventions linked to domestic abuse, disrupting serious crime groups and the Council's contribution to the Maidstone Task Force - all of which are being made in order to reduce both the short-term and long-term harm on the community.
- 3.3 The Committee will be aware that the Maidstone Task Force is nearing the completion of its work in relation to Shepway. The Task Force will be undertaking a full assessment as to the impact, but early indications are that the methodology employed has been very effective.
- 3.4 The Town Centre area has a range of characteristics and indices that promote a similar approach with a range of partners, including the Town Centre Police Team; One Maidstone; Kent County Council Youth Services; Public Health; voluntary organisations and the Council. A Task Force approach deployed in this way by these agencies would enable a more focused use of existing resources Town Centre that could assist the Community Protection Team in tackling anti-social behaviour.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 A two phased approach is recommended that will enable the Committee to review the impact of deploying a Task Force approach with a more visible role in the Town Centre. It is proposed that the Head of Housing and

Community Services provides a further report in April 2022 that will bring together an assessment of the increased presence of the Community Protection Team together with the future deployment of the Town Centre resources.

5. RISK

- 5.1 The officer recommendation is within the Council's agreed risk appetite for the intended purpose of reducing anti-social behaviour.

6. REPORT APPENDICES

- None
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7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Interventions to Reduce Anti-Social Behaviour and Crime – prepared for the National Audit Office by RAND Europe 2005

Positively Affecting Lives; Evaluation of Four Anti-Social Behaviour Projects in Wales - Report for Welsh Assembly Government August 2007 prepared by MVA Consultancy

Understanding and Addressing Anti-Social Behaviour – prepared by the University of Belfast for the Belfast Community Safety Partnership 2019

Tackling Anti-social Behaviour; House of Commons Library April 2020