

WORK OF THE ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR UNIT**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF HEALTH, HOUSING AND ADULT SERVICES DIRECTORATE****1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an overview to the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee of the work of the Council's Anti Social Behaviour Unit and the contribution made by the Unit to the Safer Sunderland Strategy.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Anti Social Behaviour Unit situated within Health, Housing and Adult Services works in partnership with other services, directorates and external partners and provides the Council's front-line response to the local communities of the City in dealing with anti social behaviour including;

- Harassment
- Threatening language and behaviour
- Nuisance caused by people drinking alcohol or being under the influence of alcohol in public places
- Rowdy behaviour
- Violent behaviour
- Nuisance caused by misuse of drugs and other substances
- Nuisance neighbours

- 2.2 The Anti Social Behaviour Unit works across all tenures of housing in the City focusing upon tackling anti social behaviour crime 'hot-spot' areas but with particular focus on the private rented sector and the private sector generally. This includes;

- Working with private landlords to develop good practice initiatives for managing their properties and reducing instances of criminal or anti social behaviour in the private rented sector
- Working with local communities to build-up trust and encourage reporting of anti-social behaviour
- Identifying perpetrators of anti social behaviour and developing appropriate intervention, in partnership with other agencies including Gentoo and other RSL's
- Addressing anti-social behaviour with young people at an early stage to prevent their behaviour from escalating, identifying any support needs and helping to link to relevant agencies
- Investigating reports of anti social behaviour in accordance with the tools and powers of the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 which includes early intervention with perpetrators and undertaking, implementing and monitoring Acceptable Behaviour Agreements
- Taking forward applications for Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO) and attending court in accordance with the procedures of the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003, and monitoring the effectiveness of the ASBO
- Supporting victims and witnesses including accompanying to court, acting as a third party witness and engaging witness protection services.

- 2.3 The unit was established in 2004, in response to the Government's 'Together' campaign. The innovative work of the team was a principal factor in the Council being awarded Trailblazer status which secured additional funding from the Government to tackle anti social behaviour. This funding is due to cease in March 2011.
- 2.4 The Council has also been successful in attaining Respect Action Area Status which again has attracted Government funding to continue the work of the anti social behaviour unit and in addition develop the Family Intervention Project. Again this funding expires in 2011.

3. CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1 The Anti Social Behaviour Unit is located within the Neighbourhood Relations Team of Health, Housing and Adult Services. The team is made up of;
- 1 Senior Anti Social Behaviour Officer to provide daily line management and lead the team
 - 4 Anti Social Behaviour Officers
 - 1 Technical Support Officer to provide technical assistance and support to the Anti Social Behaviour Unit and increase support to the witnesses and victims of anti social behaviour
- 3.2 The team covers a wide range of responsibilities to overcome the challenges contained within the Safer Sunderland Strategy. The work of the team includes;
- **Anti Social Behaviour Unit**
Investigates and resolves cases across all tenures – main focus on owner occupied and private sector
 - **Anti Social Behaviour Family Intervention Project**
Provides intensive support to chaotic families (17 max) to modify behaviour and prevent homelessness
 - **Voluntary accreditation scheme for landlords**
Promoting good landlords practices
 - **Mediation Service**
Resolving disputes involving neighbours, landlords and tenants
 - **City Wide Housing Enforcement Team**
Carrying out enforcement activity associated with housing standards including houses in multiple occupation
 - **Empty Properties**
Bringing empty properties in the private sector back into use

The work of the team recognises the strong link between anti social behaviour and sub standard or mismanaged property and empty properties.

3.3 Family Intervention Project

The Anti Social Behaviour Family Intervention Project (FIP) is also an invaluable tool to deal with problematic families and accommodation issues. The FIP provides intensive support to a maximum number of 17 of the most chaotic families in Sunderland whose behaviour has caused for enforcement action to be taken in respect of anti-social behaviour and has put at risk the tenancy of the property,

The FIP staff work together with the Anti Social Behaviour Unit and take a persistent approach to the whole family and work to modify behaviour and eliminate the presenting risk of homelessness or seek the provision of alternative accommodation where necessary. This work costs on average £17k for each family, however the cost to the Council should families not receive this service could be considerably more with the majority of the costs falling to the Homelessness Service and Childrens Services.

The positive work of the FIP has resulted in increase funding resource from the Government to extend the work of the FIP and include a Youth Crime FIP. The Youth Crime FIP targets those families who, through certain influences, have a higher risk of entering into or continuing with, a criminal life. There are robust governance and monitoring arrangements for the FIP to ensure the outcomes are sustainable and meet the relevant strategic objectives. A case study is attached (see Appendix 1) for Members' information.

3.4 The Anti Social Behaviour Unit dealt with approximately 500 requests for service during 2008/2009. On an area basis the breakdown is as follows;

- North – 55
- East – 148
- West – 98
- Coalfield – 57
- Washington – 133

In addition, in 2008/09 the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit received 75 Member requests for service.

It should also be noted that each request for service does not necessarily equal only one complainant or perpetrator i.e. 1 request for service may deal with a multitude of complainants or perpetrators. These requests for service do not include the referral and advisory information provided by the Anti Social Behaviour Unit and the proactive work undertaken by the Unit.

It is clear that early intervention undertaken with a specific geographical focus would result in a greater impact being realised, however available staffing resources meant that the team's ability to carry out this work is limited.

3.5 The Anti Social Behaviour Officers attend the Local Multi Agency Problem Solving Meetings to determine the role and responsibilities of the members of the meetings in tackling those cases of anti-social behaviour that require a multi-agency approach.

3.6 The Anti Social Behaviour Unit is also responsible for carrying out 'vetting checks' on behalf of landlords who are members of the City Council's Accreditation Scheme. The vetting procedure includes using information held by the Unit, information from the Council's exclusion register and also Police information, where necessary, to inform the private landlord whether or not the tenant would be a 'suitable' tenant. The Unit process approximately 30 such requests per month.

4. FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR THE ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR UNIT

4.1 Safer Sunderland Partnership Priorities

The priority for 2009/10 is to tackle anti social behaviour and the perceptions of it. In order to achieve this, a number of actions need to be implemented including:

- Working with the Police to patrol 'hot-spot' areas on evenings and weekends, identify perpetrators of anti social behaviour and witness incidents thus preventing the need for victims to take the stand at Court
- Working with the Environmental Enforcement Officers to identify perpetrators of environmental crime and anti-social behaviour
- Attend youth diversionary activities to promote the work of the Anti Social Behaviour Unit
- Attend residents' meetings and community engagement sessions to promote the Anti Social Behaviour Unit, encourage reporting of anti-social behaviour and build up trust and rapport within communities
- Provide high visibility patrols within the City
- Provide a service to 'working' clients within the City
- Work flexibly to provide the service that the City wants and needs

4.2 Area Committee Priorities

The Area Committees have given the Safe Theme a high priority. Following an extensive programme of consultation with members, partners, community stakeholders and the wider community, the agreed priorities for this theme are:

- Reduce anti-social behaviour, crime, disorder and substance misuse
- Reduce perceptions of anti-social behaviour
- Build confident communities with mutual support, trust and respect
- Improve partnership working
- Reduce fear of crime
- Target underage drinking
- Strengthen relationships between the multi-agencies and the community

These agreed priorities have been used to formulate an action plan for each of the Area Committees.

4.3 Legislative Changes

Drink Banning Orders

Drink Banning Orders came into force on the 31 August 2009 and are aimed at individuals who have engaged in criminal or disorderly conduct whilst under the influence of alcohol and where such an order is necessary to protect persons from further conduct of that kind.

The Council and the Police can apply to the Magistrates Court for the imposition of a Drink Banning Order on an individual which is another valuable tool available to tackle alcohol disorder.

Closure Orders

In December 2008, Section 118 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act was amended to introduce new powers to allow the closure of premises associated with significant and persistent disorder.

The intention of this provision is to empower Councils and the Police to take rapid and effective action against activity that causes great harm to communities. The use of the Closure Order would send out a powerful message that communities should not, and will no, be expected to tolerate significant and persistent anti-social behaviour

4.4 Anti Social Behaviour Team

The Anti Social Behaviour Unit and Family Intervention Project are heavily dependent on Government funding much of which expires in 2011.

In addition, the Anti Social Behaviour Unit is very much a victim of it's own success with an increasing demand for service, particularly outside of normal office hours. This leaves very little time to look at proactively preventing anti social behaviour

4.5 Partnership Working

The real challenge for the future will be to demonstrate how the Council can effectively work with it's partners and the community to maximise all of the city available resources to tackle anti social behaviour. For example how can the Anti Social Behaviour Unit work more effectively with the Councils Environmental Enforcement Officers of the specialised Neighbourhood Safety Team and Anti Social Behaviour Customer Group of Gentoo.

5. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 Members are requested to note the work of the Anti Social Behaviour Unit within Health, Housing and Adult Services and the contribution made to the Safer Sunderland Strategy.

Appendix 1

CASE STUDY

AREA

The Coalfields area contains predominantly private rented housing provided by un-accredited landlords. Residents in Coalfields were unhappy about the behaviour of a family living in a private rented property who they claimed were attracting undesirables to the area.

INTELLIGENCE

Reports from Police indicated an increase in calls reporting ASB within the locality. A Neighbourhood Beat Manager raised concerns about the family whose children were the main perpetrators frequently reported for:-

- Verbal abuse from both youths and their parents to neighbours
- Damage to tree's/property
- Attracting undesirables into the area and hanging around in large groups
- Intimidation
- Young male seen with knife
- Threatening behaviour
- Noise
- Bullying
- Kids hanging out of windows

INVOLVMENT

- Police
- Sunderland City Council Anti-Social Behaviour Officer
- DISC/FIP (support providers)
- HOTS (Housing & Options Team)
- Ontrak (parenting & support provider)
- Education
- Ashkirk Homeless Unit Cheviot Housing RSL

INTERVENTIONS

- Warning letter to problem property
- Interview with perpetrators (all partners)
- Referral to DISC for support
- Increase in Police presence
- Acceptable Behaviour Agreement's
- Common Assessment Framework
- Working alongside landlord

IMPLEMENTATION

From August '08 to November '08 SCC ASB Officer co-ordinated interventions by partners. Current and future actions were regularly reviewed and adapted to respond to developing situations. This was made possible only by regular information sharing and frequent meetings.

GETTING AND KEEPING WITNESSES ON BOARD

SCC ASB Officer issued Incident Diary Sheets to four residents who agreed to log further incidents. Complainants were telephoned at least twice a week to explain ongoing and future action.

Safe Homes referrals were made for all complainants who felt their property was at risk.

KEY PERPETRATORS IDENTIFIED

Perpetrator A at problem property
Perpetrator B at problem property
Perpetrator C at problem property
Perpetrator D at problem property
Perpetrator E at problem property
Perpetrator F at neighbouring property
Perpetrator G at neighbouring property
Perpetrator H at neighbouring property

Perpetrators A & B - parents who had split up but recently reconciled

Perpetrators C, D & E aged between 10 – 14 years old, regularly truanted from school, smoked, ran away from home and identified as being main perpetrators of ASB within street.

Perpetrator F Adult female at neighbouring property that appeared to encourage her children to aggravate situation

Perpetrator G & H aged 17 & 18 identified by Police for assault and damage to problem property

SEPTEMBER 2008

ABA'S signed by parents and children at problem property, conditions set around identified behaviour.

Parents have admitted they struggle to deal with children's behaviour and have agreed to referral for support around parenting.

SEPTEMBER 2008

Noise equipment installed in neighbouring property in order to prove/disprove levels of noise.

OCTOBER 2008

Referral to DISC/ Family Intervention Project, case accepted and assessment to take place to determine level of support required.

OCTOBER 2008

Multi-Agency meeting called to discuss reports of damage to property, family being harassed by neighbouring tenants. Reports from Police confirming it is becoming unsafe for the family to stay in the area.

Outcome:-

Referral made to Ashkirk Homeless Unit who have the capacity to house and work and support the family on a full time basis on the following areas:-

- Parenting/Boundaries
- Basic needs
- Anger management
- Education/Attendance
- Housekeeping
- Finances

IMPACT – WHAT WERE THE OUTCOMES FOR THE PERPETRATORS, VICTIMS AND THE COMMUNITY?

Ashkirk Homeless Unit accepted the referral and the family moved into the unit within two weeks. Support workers will initially carry out a risk assessment then formulate and action plan on areas of support.

They will continue to work with the family until there is evidence that they are ready to be rehoused within the community with low level support, then an exit strategy put in place.

Residents of Coalfield have reported a big difference and say the street is very quiet. This has been confirmed in reports of anti-social behaviour which are now low level.