

Speech for 20 March Social Exclusion Task Force

Socially Excluded Families

Tackling social exclusion, poverty and building sustainable communities are fundamental objectives of the Government's respect programme. Improving the lives of those living in the most disadvantaged areas is a key driver for our work and the action we promote at both local and national level.

The fact is that you are four times more likely to perceive anti-social behaviour to be a problem if you are poor and perception means, in this case, experience.

We will not reach and help that very small number who are the most excluded and the most challenging unless we deal with their behaviour or the behaviour of those around them.

- We won't get a child back into school unless we deal with the fact that his mother is unable to get him up and out of the house.
- We will not get anti-social families to address parenting skills if we are happy to leave when they refuse to engage.
- The lone parent will not attend a group on the estate to meet other mums while she is frightened to leave the house because of the behaviour of her neighbours.

By challenging behaviour I mean recognising that just because people have problems doesn't mean that they have a right to make the lives of those around them a misery.

It means recognising that just because people say they don't want help doesn't mean they don't need it.

Bad behaviour is difficult to confront and easy to excuse.

Some service providers are uncomfortable with the notion of judging some behaviour as unacceptable. But if we're not judgmental about behaviour we're copping out, taking the easy route and actually badly letting down both the perpetrators of that behaviour as well as those on the receiving end.

Let me give you an example - at one of the projects that's working with chronically anti social families with endless problems and difficulties – this 8 year old girl in the family, living amidst the chaos of this house, said she didn't want to live. The family was in a right state and this child at the age of 8 had lost faith in her parents and all of us.

For 11 years, agencies had worked with that family – since before she was born. Things had just seemed to get worse. As well as ASB, there was domestic violence, mental health problems, drug abuse, children on the child protection register, none of them in school.

And the first thing that project did was say we will help you but you need to change your behaviour - we will evict unless you engage – and to show they meant business they demoted the family's tenancy – and that got their attention.

Of course that wasn't the only thing but it was the line in the sand, it was saying enough is enough. Those kids are now off the child protection register, the 8 year old is thriving in school, over 80% reduction in complaints and police call-outs and the community is happier (they offer their view on how behaviour has changed).

These projects are a flagship for the Respect programme – they follow a model – the family, their problems and the services around them are 'gripped' by a project worker who both challenges them to change their behaviour, through the use of enforcement tools such as ASBOs, like demotions – in fact whatever they can - as well as supports them in tackling problems like parenting skills, mental health and drug / alcohol addiction related problems.

And I do mean grip - when the family doesn't turn up for appointments, or the kids aren't up and out in the morning, or the mum says she can't live under these rules – the project worker

doesn't reduce her visits, she increases them, she knocks on the door louder, if they don't answer, she goes round the back. She doesn't go away. They are literally in the family's face.

They have astounding success – 85% decline in complaints about anti-social behaviour; 36% improvement in school attendance; housing stabilised for all families. The positive outcomes for children are striking.

We're currently rolling out a network Family Intervention Projects across the country which will grip these high need families, and lever them into accepting the help and support they so desperately need.

And the thing that these aren't families who have slipped below the wire of public services. 15-20 agencies are not uncommon for some of these families – they need diary managers!

And they also showed us about how difficult our public services find it to work with certain groups of people - people who can be unpleasant, intimidating and unmotivated. But what we have

learned is that help people we do need to be very tough with them so that they can actually move on.

It is so important that we address those who are the most challenging - for two reasons – **one** because we shouldn't be giving up on anyone and **two** because if we can change their behaviour then we can do it with anyone.

It provides inspiration and motivation to those who are working in difficult circumstances and to those in the community that felt like nothing can change.

I don't pretend to have the answers but I do believe what we are doing with our family projects and more broadly here has the potential to make inroads into the inter-generational transmission of disadvantage and cycles of poverty and disadvantage.

Another key area for making inroads in tackling behaviour and indeed improving life chances is parenting. There is such powerful evidence around how much good quality parenting classes can help change behaviour and we have made it a huge priority for the Respect programme.

A study of children who were on child and adolescent mental health services lists and whose parents did one of the Incredible Years course showed a decline by half in their problem behaviour, with that sustained a year later. For those on the waiting list for the service, there had been no change.

So that's why we're putting parenting at the heart of the Respect programme

- We're funding 77 areas to have a Senior Parenting Practitioner to work with families who are anti-social or whose children' are getting into problems.
- we're working with the DfES to provide training in evidence based parenting programmes for FIPs, for early intervention to 18 Pathfinder areas and additional funding for parenting in 40 Respect Areas,
- This is in addition to new expectations on children's services to improve the quality and co-ordination of parenting services.
- And I'm pleased that the SETF are developing the Health-Led Pathfinders (Nurse Family Partnership).

And so I want to see parenting support way higher up the list of services available in our communities, but I'm really keen to get people this kind of help who are not asking for it.

And I think we don't do pay enough attention to the parents who say I don't need help. They may be in denial about their problems, they may say it's someone else's fault, usually their child. No-one wants to be called a failing parent - how many times have you heard parents say – *I don't know how little Johnny got like this?*

These are the ones we should worry about, they are the ones who have most to gain from the courses, and public services have most to gain from them attending them.

And we have various tools at our disposal here – one of those is persistence - not giving up on parents who say it's not them that need help – going round the back door when they don't answer at the front – just like the family projects.

Another is parenting contracts and orders – requiring people to engage – the evidence shows that those who are ordered by the court to go on those courses are initially reluctant and often hostile

– no surprise there. But by the end there's no difference in the outcome for those who went voluntarily or were forced there.

That is why we should not be afraid to use compulsion where voluntary interventions have failed and it's why we are extending the number of agencies which will be able to apply to the courts for parenting orders.

This is not about punishment but about how we get to those who most need the help.

The consequences of poor parenting are too great for us to sit back and say oh well, it's her choice not to come. The cost of not helping families is too high in terms of child poverty, crime, ASB and god knows what else. And so it means, like I said at the beginning, doing things which are uncomfortable sometimes...

We should have high aspirations for people - when we don't challenge the mum or dad with the difficult life to go on a parenting course because their children are not turning up for school and are causing problems in the community - we are letting down that mum and dad, their children and the community.

So our job as service providers is to recognise and understand the problems that have engulfed people, but more than that it is to help people move on to live successfully within their community and so change lives. And by so doing we can together make new inroads into child poverty and social exclusion.

Thank you.