Anti-social behaviour is a pattern of criminal behaviour, often described as ‘low-level disorder’. While each incident individually may not seem serious, the cumulative effect of such daily ‘low-level disorder’ blights lives, not just of its immediate victims but also of the wider community, affecting their quality of life and their confidence in public services. Left unchecked, anti-social behaviour can escalate, with perpetrators emboldened to commit more serious crimes.

Too many people still experience problems with anti-social behaviour on a day to day basis, and much of it still goes unreported. It is therefore vital that when anti-social behaviour happens, the public know where to go to for help, are taken seriously and are protected through swift, focussed action – using the tools and powers available until the problem has stopped.

This is one of a series of five fact sheets that bring together new and existing evidence about what drives public confidence in the police and criminal justice system. It also details recent national policy developments. The final ‘tips for local practice’ section brings together practical examples of things that have worked well around the country.

**Summary:**

- Tackling anti-social behaviour and letting the public know about action you are taking is vital for building confidence in public services
- There is a wide range of tools and powers available to tackle anti-social behaviour and evidence shows these to be effective in up to 93% of cases
- An effective response to anti-social behaviour involves making it easy to report problems, taking the right action at the right time to stop problems and continuing to take action until the anti-social behaviour has stopped

**Why tackle anti-social behaviour?**

Nationally, **perceptions of anti-social behaviour being a problem have fallen** in recent years from 21 per cent in 2002/03 to 15 per cent in the year ending September 2009. However where it is a concern, the public often say that it is **the most important local crime issue**.

**Perceptions of anti-social behaviour have a significant impact on quality of life**, with evidence showing it to be very strongly associated with actual experience and satisfaction as a place to live.

- Anti-social behaviour has also been found to be a **key driver of confidence in the police**.

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The majority (around three-quarters) of anti-social behaviour incidents go unreported to any agency or individual. The reasons for not reporting include a perception that it is a 'waste of time', that authorities will be unable or unwilling to take action, not wanting to get involved, or fearing reprisal. Effective action to tackle problems will lead to more people coming forward.

Tackling anti-social behaviour is a key reputational issue for local services. 63% of the public hold the police and 54% local authorities responsible for tackling problems such as noisy neighbours, vandalism, drunk and disorderly behaviour and graffiti. Although people are interested in hearing about what is being done about crime and anti-social behaviour, this is the issue they feel their council least informs them about. Those who are informed about action to tackle anti-social behaviour are significantly more confident in both police and local council.

There is strong public support for using tools and powers to stop anti-social behaviour – 82% of the public support issuing Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) for people responsible for anti-social behaviour, with 70% of people saying they send out a clear message that action will be taken.

Evidence shows that used properly, the tools to tackle anti-social behaviour are effective. The National Audit Office found most people who received an anti-social behaviour intervention did not re-engage in anti-social behaviour. The vast majority of offenders stopped their anti-social behaviour, with 65% of people stopping after one intervention rising to 93% after the third intervention. The key to effective use is to use the right tool at the right time.

**Effective use of tools and powers to tackle problems**

Under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 all local authorities have a duty to produce and publish a procedure on how they are going to tackle anti-social behaviour. The Home Office now expects all CSPs to have minimum standards on the approach that they will take to tackling anti-social behaviour and these should be publicised widely.

An effective response to anti-social behaviour will include the use of civil powers, which are capable of dealing with the ongoing and repetitive nature of anti-social behaviour. It can also include action to ensure parents attend parenting courses, the use of family intervention projects for the most challenging and dysfunctional families to stop their anti-social behaviour, as well as diversionary activities such as youth clubs and activities being available on Friday and Saturday nights. Tools and powers include:

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7 Home Office polling (2009)


- informal warnings and agreements (including ABCs, parenting agreements and warning letters);
- civil orders to prohibit the anti-social behaviour of individuals (e.g. injunctions and ASBOs);
- powers to deal with groups of people (e.g. Dispersal Orders);
- court orders to require adherence to a tailored package of support (e.g. Parenting Orders and Individual Support Orders attached to ASBOs); and
- powers to evict or close premises where anti-social behaviour and nuisance are blighting communities (e.g. Premises Closure Orders and evictions).

The right power or approach will depend on the circumstances of the case and the needs of the victim, but a combination of approaches will usually be required. Enforcement action should not be a last resort, but a proportionate response to anti-social behaviour where it will stop problems. For example, where violence is threatened, action in court will be required; informal or voluntary agreements should not be pursued where perpetrators are obviously unwilling to comply.

The Serious Case Review Summary about services’ handling of the family of two brothers who went on to commit a very serious assault on two other young boys in Edlington in 2009, commented:

“There was too much reliance on using agreements and warnings to change their behaviour; this reflected an insufficiently authoritative, consistent and assertive strategy in working with a family who were uncooperative and anti-social in attitude and behaviour”.

When taking action, the focus should be on reducing or stopping the anti-social behaviour and action should continue until it has been stopped. Whether or not the problem has reduced or stopped should not be assumed, but be checked with the victim and the community.

Similarly, once an ASBO is obtained, there should be ongoing monitoring of compliance, support for victims and the ASBO actively managed to ensure that any reported breaches can be swiftly enforced.

Finally, it is vital that action taken is publicised so that the community are aware of what is being done to tackle anti-social behaviour, to show that problems can be solved and to give victims the confidence to come forward and take a stand.

For more information about effective use of tools and powers, practitioners can contact the Home Office Action Line on 0870 220 2000 or by email at ActionLine@bss.org.
Tips for local practice

1) Make it as easy as possible for the public to report anti-social behaviour – there are a wide range of agencies with responsibility for tackling anti-social behaviour – however the public should not be passed between agencies until they manage to contact the ‘right’ agency for the problem. In North East Lincolnshire, minimum standards for tackling anti-social behaviour provide a single anti-social behaviour hotline. Reports of anti-social behaviour that come to services directly are forwarded to the police without delay if that agency cannot deal with the incident.

2) Ensure all partners are aware of the civil powers – civil powers have been developed specifically to deal with the ongoing and repetitive nature of anti-social behaviour. Agencies dealing with anti-social behaviour – the police, the local authority and social landlords – should all be well-versed in their use to protect victims and stop problems. Civil orders such as injunctions and interim ASBOs can be obtained swiftly and should be used where appropriate alongside criminal prosecutions.

3) Support victims and witnesses of anti-social behaviour – it is important that victims are supported throughout the process and that they hear first about developments in a case. It is good practice to agree with victims how, and how often, they want to be kept updated on their case. In Birmingham, Victim Support is funded to provide a dedicated service for victims of anti-social behaviour and work alongside the anti-social behaviour team throughout the process. In Knowsley, service standards for victims of anti-social behaviour have been agreed and widely distributed. There is now a Home Office funded network of Victims’ Champions in 85 areas across the country, who will work to improve services for victims of anti-social behaviour.

4) Publicise what is being done to tackle anti-social behaviour – one of the reasons for not reporting anti-social behaviour is lack of confidence that action will be taken to tackle it. Regular information in newsletters and leaflets about what is being done to deal with anti-social behaviour locally reassures the public that the issues that matter to them are being tackled. As well as giving the public information about what is being done locally, publicity about individual civil orders such as ASBOs will usually be necessary to help the public report any breaches. An ASBO leaflet should usually include a photograph of the perpetrator, a list of prohibitions, a map of any areas the perpetrator is excluded from and details of who to contact if a breach is witnessed. Bristol has also made good use of leaflets about closure of local crack houses.

5) Prosecution of breach of ASBO is vital for public confidence – ASBOs are designed to prevent the recurrence of anti-social behaviour from happening and to protect the community. Getting an order is not the end of the process — prohibitions must be adhered to, and if they are not then the breach should be prosecuted. The Crown Prosecution Service have a ‘positive prosecution policy’ regarding ASBO breaches so that where there is sufficient evidence, it will usually be in the public interest to prosecute breaches. Breaches should be seen in terms of the harm to the community that led to the original application, and not viewed in isolation as a ‘technical’ breach. Birmingham City Council are prosecuting ASBO breaches themselves where the local authority was the original applicant.