

Draft for Consultation until 25th April 08

*BUILDING SAFER
COMMUNITIES*

*Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Community Safety Strategy*

2008-2011

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1. Foreword

Over the past seven years the Housing Executive has played a major role in responding to the emerging community safety agenda in Northern Ireland. We have introduced a range of housing management services to address anti social behaviour and have forged partnerships with a range of other agencies to lever in expertise and funding to deliver improvements to our most disadvantaged areas. While much good work has been done, there remains much more to do. If we are to make our communities safer, everyone working in the field of community safety, from statutory agencies, through to neighbourhoods and the people who live in them, all must play their part. All have a valuable contribution to make.

The Northern Ireland Community Safety Strategy identified three main strands to community safety: tackling crime, the fear of crime and anti social behaviour. While the Housing Executive's primary focus within this strategy document is how we address anti social behaviour, we also acknowledge the contribution made by our design and building services and our private sector grant departments in reducing and preventing crime.

We are not complacent about the impact anti social behaviour can have on people's lives, if left unchecked, anti social behaviour can destroy communities, blight estates and lead to heightened criminality. The Housing Executive will not tolerate anti social behaviour in any form and will work with communities, as well as the voluntary and statutory sector to ensure that it does not take hold.

Building on our commitment through partnership to tackle crime, the fear of crime and anti social behaviour, this document sets out the Housing Executive's key priorities for the next three years for the creation of safer and more secure environments in which individuals, families and communities can realise their full potential. We will support our key priorities with an action plan which will focus our energies to achieve real and lasting improvements. To ensure long term sustainability, action against crime, fear of crime and anti social behaviour must be matched by work to promote positive behaviour that builds strong communities. We have already done much to improve people's quality of life, this strategy gives us all an opportunity to do more.

Paddy McIntyre
Chief Executive

2. Our Vision for Housing In Northern Ireland

The Housing Executive has a vision in which housing plays its part in making an important contribution to creating a peaceful, inclusive and fair society. In seeking to make this vision a reality, the Executive is committed to tackling anti social behaviour, in all its forms, as and when it arises on our estates. In doing so, our goal is to improve the quality of people's lives.

We look to a future in which everyone will have a sense of peace and well being from living in a safe environment free of anti social behaviour

In tackling ASB we will:-

- *Do more than is legally required under the conditions of tenancy*
- *Quickly and formally acknowledge all reports of ASB*
- *Seek to investigate all reported cases of ASB in a timely manner*
- *Provide advice and support for an individual's own action.*
- *Identify and interview all interested parties*
- *Establish inter agency working where appropriate*
- *Use legal action where appropriate, when all efforts of conciliations are deemed inappropriate*
- *Endeavour to take action on behalf of Housing Executive tenants who are Victims of ASB perpetrated by non Housing Executive tenants*
- *Seek to respond to reports of ASB on Housing Executive estates whether the complainant is an Executive tenant, private sector tenant or owner occupier*
- *In the context of re-housing, take full account of any ASB carried out by the housing applicant or any member of their household, to the extent that it is legal permissible.*
- *We will seek to address proportionately the needs of vulnerable victims and witnesses*

3. Strategic Context

As a response to the emerging community safety agenda in Northern Ireland, and in particular the problems of anti social behaviour, the Housing Executive, in 2000, launched its Community Safety and Community Relations Strategy. This strategy contained an action plan which detailed approximately 30 recommendations designed to address anti social behaviour and associated issues. Since publication, the Housing Executive has updated its action plan on an annual basis to reflect increased legislative powers and strategic direction. The purpose of this document is to outline the strategic approach the Housing Executive has developed over the past seven years, to define the housing management services it now provides, and to outline its key themes and priorities for the next three years.

Community Safety is a quality of life issue which impacts on all of society, individually and collectively. Responsibility for crime prevention and community safety are no longer viewed as the responsibility of the Criminal Justice System alone. The work of the Housing Executive in addressing crime, the fear of crime and anti social behaviour, is making an important contribution to delivering real social change in many of our most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland.

Within the broader Northern Ireland community safety context there have been a range of factors which have influenced the strategic direction of the Housing Executive.

Statutory Interventions

In addressing ASB the Housing Executive has employed an incremental and proportionate approach at all times. We will work with the perpetrator through a range of interventions available in an attempt to keep the individual in their home while addressing their unacceptable behaviour. However, in circumstances where the individual fails to respond to offers of assistance and the ASB continues, or where the ASB is of such a serious nature that the Housing Executive must take immediate action, then we will use the legal powers available to us to ensure that victims of ASB are protected and the unacceptable behaviour is stopped. Legal interventions can take a number forms, we may chose to repossess the property occupied by the perpetrator or we may seek an injunction or an ASBO to stop the ASB and protect the community. The statutory powers available to the Housing Executive are set out as follows:-

- ***The Housing (NI) Order 1988 (Part11) Art. 7A***
- ***The Housing (NI) Order 1981 Art.22A***
- ***The Housing (NI) Order 1983 Art.25-Schedule 3a as amended by the***
- ***The Housing (NI) Order 2003***
- ***The Anti Social Behaviour (NI) Order 2004***

CASE STUDY

Housing Executive Invoke Legal Powers to Protect Community

BACKGROUND

Joe Brown was a 52 year old male who occupied an upper floor flat at 47 Anywhere Street, he was an alcoholic who continuously invited visitors to his property for heavy drinking sessions. One of his visitors Mark Mann who lived in a nearby property in Green Drive also caused serious nuisance both at Anywhere Street and at his own property. Quite frequently these two individuals and their drinking associates travelled between the two properties. Reports of nuisance started coming through to the District Office in February 2006 from 3 residents in the block occupied by Joe Brown. One of the residents who reported the nuisance was terminally ill and lived directly below Joe Brown's flat

INVESTIGATIONS

Immediately following interviews with the complainants, an interview was held with Mr. Brown. He did admit that he had friends who called regularly and there were instances when shouting and arguing had occurred. Mr. Brown was reminded of his obligations under his tenancy agreement and the right of other residents to live in peace and quiet. Medical reports were sought in relation to Mr. Brown's alcohol addiction.

In the interim, further reports of nuisance were received in the District Office at which time the complainants were asked to complete incident diaries. The reported nuisance was of a serious nature and included all night parties with loud music in some instances lasting 2 consecutive nights involving groups of 20 or more people. Arguing and shouting and the use of foul language of a sexual nature emanated constantly from both inside and outside the flat. On a number of occasions Mr. Brown and his visitors caused nuisance and annoyance by banging on neighbours doors, shouting and using obscene language and at one stage actually attempted assault on one of the other residents. The communal door to the flats was kicked in almost daily by persons visiting Mr. Brown and residents also reported the door to his flat was broken, leaving the flat unsecured and facilitating easy access to the stream of visitors to 47 Anywhere Street. Fights on communal landing were a common occurrence as was the sight and smell of urine. In addition to undertaking its own investigation, the District Office advised the complainants to contact the PSN and also directly sought a report from the police. Both Mr. Brown and Mr. Mann were issued with final warning letters.

ACTION

As a result of the serious nature of the complaints, the District Office decided that the most appropriate form of action was to take possession of both properties. In order to provide protection to the complainants, the District Office also requested that injunctions be sought in whilst legal proceeding for repossession were ongoing against Mr. Brown and Mr. Mann. NSPs were issued on 24th Feb. 2006 against Mr. Brown and Mr. Mann, Injunctions were granted in April 2006 with a repossession hearing scheduled for June 2006.

OUTCOME

The Housing Executive was successful in obtaining injunctions in respect of Mr. Brown and Mr. Mann, setting out a number of prohibitions. Mr. Brown subsequently breached the prohibitions and the judge ordered a Committal Warrant to be drawn up committing Mr. Brown to seven days in prison. Orders for possession were obtained in both cases in June 2006 with the Housing Executive being awarded immediate possession of both properties

Non Statutory Interventions

The Housing Executive receives and processes approximately 4500 reports of ASB annually. The majority of reports are of low level forms of ASB and are resolved at district office level without any recourse to legal action. As each case, irrespective of its severity, requires some form of district office response, the Housing Executive has introduced a range of non statutory interventions. These include the use of:-

Mediation

The Housing Executive introduced its own In House Mediation Service in 2002 / 2003. In establishing the service, the Housing Executive acknowledged the findings of central government's Policy Action Report on ASB, which recommended mediation as an effective preventative and early intervention measure. Since then, over 300 Housing Executive staff have received conflict resolution training to enable them to recognise neighbour disputes which might benefit from the use of mediation. More than 500 households have taken the opportunity to try and resolve their differences through mediation and over 70% of these have seen an improvement in their situation as a result. As demand for the service has grown, the Mediation Service has attempted to build links with other statutory, voluntary and community based organisations which may, in the future, help us deliver a better and more comprehensive service to our customers. It is hoped that some of these links can be formalised and piloted over the next three years.

Warning Letters.

Warning letters have proved extremely successful in stemming ASB, Over 70% of reported ASB ceases following initial interview and the issuing of a warning letter from the district office. By making it clear to the individual that their behaviour is unacceptable and continuance may carry penalties, the perpetrator will amend their behaviour accordingly.

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs)

The Housing Executive introduced the use of ABCs in 2006/2007. An ABC is a voluntary written agreement between the Housing Executive and the person who has been involved in ASB. One or more partnering bodies (PSNI or Council) may also co-sign the ABC. There is no statutory provision for ABCs and they are not legally enforceable “contracts.

Since their introduction, ABCs have proved to be extremely successful in stopping anti social behaviour.

As part of the ABC process the Housing Executive has partnered NIACRO who have devised a support programme which is offered voluntarily to all those signing up to an ABC. The programme is called Assistance for People and Communities (APAC).

APAC provides access to a six month tailored programme of interventions including mentoring services, direct provision of skills based programmes as well as signposting to more specialist services. Strategically the Housing Executive regards the use of ABCs as one of the key tools to resolving ASB. When coupled with referral to the APAC programme, they can address many of the underlying causes of the ASB and produce positive outcomes for the individual concerned, the wider community and the Housing Executive.

CASE STUDY

The Use of ABCs as a means of successful early intervention

Background

The local District Office was presented with a number of complains of recurring ASB coming from a property on a local estate. Investigations confirmed teenage parties were taking place several nights each week. The tenant of the house was an OAP with her 15 year old grandson living with her. Following inter agency discussions at an ASB Forum meeting, the tenant was invited in, along with her grandson to meet with the District Manager who explained the reported incidents and the options available to resolve the matter. At the meeting the young person accepted responsibility for the reported incidents and agreed that both parties would sign an ABC. The grandson also accepted a referral to the APAC programme delivered by NIACRO to help address his behaviour.

Assessment

Following an assessment by APAC of the grandson it was found that his unacceptable behaviour stemmed, in part, from the marital break up of his parents which resulted in him moving in with his grandmother. Further investigations found that the grandmother had an alcohol problem which resulted in her being unable to control her grandsons behaviour: not attending school, damage to property, holding noisy parties etc.

Agreed Solution

APAC took on both the grandmother and grandson as case referrals. The grandmother received treatment for alcohol abuse, staff mentored the grandson for 6 months and, working with the local headmaster, got the young person back into full time education. APAC also worked with the young persons father and reached agreement that the son would spend weekends with him.

Outcome

The young person was reunited with his father, providing a positive role model. He remained at schools and will now move onto third level education. His grandmother has continued with her programme and all ASB has stopped.

Comments

By bringing in the expertise of NIACRO, the Housing Executive resolved, not only the ASB but the underlying problems of the individuals concerned. The outcome has been that each party has benefited from this interventionist approach

The Northern Ireland Community Safety Agenda

The Housing Executive has also been mindful of developments within the wider community safety network in Northern Ireland. The development of the Executive's community safety strategy has been guided by some of these developments:-

- *NIO Creating a Safer Neighbourhood through Partnership*
- *DSD Crime Reduction Policy*
- *The Criminal Justice Review Recommendations*
- *Community Safety Partnerships*
- *NIO Community Based Restorative Justice Protocol*

The Role of Communities

Since the late 1990s, and up to the present day, there has been a growing expectation amongst Housing Executive tenants that local District Managers and their staff should play a greater role in addressing community issues at estate level.

In May 2006 the Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy placed emphasis on communities and the requirement for their effective participation in decision making at a local level. The document states:-

“ Community engagement and participation in decision making is essential for a truly sustainable community. The participation of local people in decision making is vital to ensure that the social, environmental, and economic considerations are fully taken into account.....”.

The Housing Executive endorses the emphasis placed on the role of communities within the sustainable development strategy and seeks to reflect this approach by actively involving local people in addressing ASB. Communities sit at the heart of the community safety agenda with the Housing Executive already consulting on all aspects of its service delivery through the Housing Community Network (HCN.) The HCN comprises of 500+ community associations across Northern Ireland and it is through this existing network of bone fide associations that we will develop and support future input to community safety. In doing so, we will work with local people to develop positive approaches to ASB prevention and to encourage communities to report ASB as and when it occurs and to become more involved in the overall decision making process.

Community Based Mediation

In February 2007 the Criminal Justice Branch of the NIO published it's Protocol for Community Based Restorative Justice Schemes. The protocol established a framework for future working relations between the criminal justice system and community based schemes. Northern Ireland Alternatives (NIA) is a community based restorative justice scheme operating in the Greater Shankill Road area of West Belfast. In September 2007 NIA received formal accreditation from the NIO and in November 2007, the Housing Executive agreed a pilot partnership initiative with NIA entitled, the North and west Belfast Mediation and Community Support Programme.

The programme will permit the Housing Executive to refer agreed mediation casework to NIA in circumstances where both parties identify a preference for the NIA community based intervention. The partnership will provide a template for future potential working arrangements with other accredited community based restorative justice schemes.

External Consultation

The Housing Executive will undertake external evaluation in respect of the recommendations contained within the Action Plan (page 34) in accordance with it's Equality Scheme.

4. *What we are doing now*

The Housing Executive's strategic response to community safety is founded on two key principles:-

Principle 1. The development and delivery of Housing Executive services which directly address crime, the fear of crime and anti social behaviour.

Since 2000 the Housing Executive has introduced a range of mainstream services which have evolved in line with central government policy and our experiences of what works on the ground.

District Office Services

Reporting ASB

District offices are the first point of contact for tenants and members of the general public wishing to report incidents of anti social behaviour. District office staff have received comprehensive training in how to deal, both sensitively and speedily with ASB. Each report will be registered and acknowledged within 3 working days with the complainant being interviewed within 5 days. Should the report of ASB be of a serious nature then staff will respond immediately to end the behaviour as quickly as possible. All reports will be dealt with in strict confidence with the Housing Executive ensuring that no legal action will be taken without the full agreement of the complainant, unless there is other evidence on which we can rely.

Eligibility for Housing Assistance

As well as responding to reported incidents of ASB, district offices are also the first point of contact for those seeking Housing Executive accommodation. In the application of its powers contained in the Housing (NI) Order 2003, the Housing Executive may not allocate housing accommodation to any applicant if he, or a member of their household, has been found guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant.

Introductory Tenancies

All new tenants are advised at the commencement of their tenancy that they will be subject to an Introductory Tenancy for a period of 12 months. The conditions under which an Introductory Tenancy is granted are intended to address the specific problem of ASB and allow the Housing Executive to assess the suitability of an individual to hold a tenancy

Community Safety Team (CST)

The CST was established in August 2001 and from the outset was defined as an inter agency team. Since it's inception, the PSNI have provided a number of seconded police officers into the team. The role of the CST is to provide support and training to all district offices, to develop and introduce clear and consistent policies and procedures for the processing of ASB cases and to provide support in taking cases of ASB through the court process. While we acknowledge that there will be circumstances in when it will be appropriate for us to use our legal powers to stop serious anti social behaviour from occurring, it is equally acknowledged that focus should also be given to early interventions which will support and divert individuals who are at risk of offending. To this end, the CST are now in discussions with a range of agencies to draw on the expertise of those working in the fields of health, education, social welfare, resettlement and restorative practices. In doing so, we would seek to address many of the underlying causes of crime and ASB, rather than simply responding to incidents after they have occurred.

Mediation Services

While the work of the CST addresses those incidents of ASB where court action is required, it is also accepted that many cases of low level nuisance and ASB are often inappropriate for court action. These cases continue to be a drain on district office resources. As a result of a partnership arrangement with Mediation Northern Ireland, the Housing Executive introduced a pilot mediation service in 2002/2003. This service initially focused on three district offices, before being formally evaluated and incrementally rolled out to all 35 district outlets. In four years of service delivery, the demand for mediation has increased significantly. Some 500 households have been referred to the Mediation Service to date. The service is now looking at new and emerging areas of mediation activity to which will extend service provision beyond disputes between neighbours. This work includes the use of family group conferencing techniques and restorative practices. In addition to expansion of the in house service, new partnerships with community and statutory organisations are being explored also. At present the mediation team (which forms part of the CST) comprises of 3 officers: - a senior Mediation Development Officer and two full time professionally qualified mediators.

Neighbourhood Wardens

Within the context of Neighbourhood Renewal, the Housing Executive in 2002, piloted the introduction of 15 Neighbourhood Wardens targeted on some of our most disadvantaged estates. The purpose of the warden service is to make our estates cleaner and safer places to live. Their work focuses on 4 main areas of activity:-

- *Housing Management*
- *Environmental Management*
- *Community Safety*
- *Community Infrastructure*

In late 2003, the Neighbourhood Wardens service was externally evaluated by Research and Evaluation Services. The results of the evaluation indicated that the service provided value for money and improved district office services to tenants.

Since then the number of wardens has increased with 65 neighbourhood wardens now in full time employment.

Neighbourhood Officers

In June 2005 the Housing Executive established a partnership arrangement with Belfast City Council to pilot a Neighbourhood Officer service in 4 areas of Belfast. This service is based on the Executive's Neighbourhood Warden model with particular emphasis on environmental matters, particularly in relation to council services. The pilot has been successfully rolled out and is now in the process of being introduced in other council areas outside of Belfast.

CASE STUDY

Neighbourhood Warden Makes Major Contribution to Regeneration of Parkmore Estate, Lurgan

For almost 5 years Michelle Hazlett has worked as a neighbourhood wardens on the Parkmore Estate in Lurgan, which is one of the most socially disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland. Working sometimes under difficult conditions Michelle has done much to improve relations between the local community and the Housing Executive. She has been instrumental in initiating a number of projects designed to address ASB and increase community confidence in the area. Michelle has organised community representation from Parkmore, organised and attended community meetings, surveyed the area to consider environmental and social issues impacting on ASB and has worked closely with a range of statutory organisations to address many of the ASB issues impacting on her patch.

The Parkmore Estate has suffered in the past from blight created by a significant level of void properties which were deemed as unsuitable for letting. These properties attracted ASB elements and led to a further decline within the estate. In 2006 Michelle was nominated for the Housing executive's neighbourhood warden Achievement Award for her innovative approach to tackling void properties. In partnership with the Parkmore community, Michelle started working on the Parkmore Voids management project. The key objective of the initiative was to reduce crime and the fear of crime amongst residents and to encourage youths to become more responsible for their behaviour and thus promote a more positive image of the estate.

Michelle went on to win the Achievement Award with the £500.00 prize being ploughed back into the initiative.

Building Standards

Research has confirmed that the condition of the physical environment is one of the factors which can influence behaviour. Poor housing conditions linked to high levels of social deprivation can lead to estates becoming unpopular, stigmatised with high turnover of stock and transfer requests out. To effectively manage and regenerate such estates, the Housing Executive acknowledges the need for an ongoing programme of physical improvements to address decline. These programmes form an important element of a holistic, wraparound approach to tackle community safety and in particular, anti social behaviour which may manifest itself should such conditions go unaddressed.

The Housing Executive is committed to the highest standards of house design and works closely with the PSNI Architectural Liaison Officers to ensure that Designing Out Crime standards are fully implemented. In terms of addressing the community safety needs of existing stock the Housing Executive delivers a programme of planned environmental and physical improvement schemes which address such issues as:-

- *improved lighting to public areas*
- *rationalisation of hard and soft landscaping*
- *traffic safety measures*
- *removal of “left over” spaces*
- *creation of better defined private external spaces*
- *Provision of in curtilage car parking spaces*
- *Rationalisation of rear entries and controlled access to them*
- *Secure boundary fencing*
- *Address location specific issues through community involvement*
- *Provision of multi point locks on all external doors*
- *Reduce/ eliminate, where possible, shared access to entrances of flatted blocks*

Private Sector Interventions

As ASB is not confined to public sector stock, the Housing Executive, in its role as the regional strategic housing authority for Northern Ireland has developed a range of services and interventions designed to address community safety issues within the private sector. These services and interventions include:-

HMO/ Community Safety Warden Service

The high density of student occupied HMOs in Derry and the Holyland area of Belfast has, in recent years led to an increase in ASB around both city university areas. In addressing these issues, the Housing Executive has partnered the universities, the city councils and

police in each city to provide a university warden service. Operational management of the service is provided by the respective city council.

Special Control Provisions

The application of Special Control Provisions, as part of the statutory HMO Registration Scheme requires landlords within the Fitzroy HMO Action Area to take reasonably practicable steps to prevent or reduce adverse effects of an HMO. Failure to take appropriate steps may result in a landlord's registration being revoked.

Grant Aid

Persons aged 60years and over and in receipt of a specified means tested benefit are eligible for Basic Security Measures (BSM) grant aid. Measures which can be considered include:- external door security, window security, door viewers and external lighting. Where more extensive home security measures are required, a PSNI crime prevention report is required.

Community Cohesion

While the Housing Executive has developed it's response to the government's Shared Future document through the setting up of a Community Cohesion Unit, there are situations and circumstances where Community Safety and Community Cohesion overlap. Examples of crossover would be where reports of ASB are defined as hate crime incidents and require a more joined up approach through the provision of support services accessed through the Community Cohesion Unit. The policy, procedures and services already in place include:-

- *Community Cohesion Unit established 2005*
- *Protocol on Flags and Emblems with relevant statutory agencies in place April 2005*
- *2 No. race Community Cohesion Officers appointed 2006*
- *Hate Crime leaflet published 2007*
- *Community Safety included on agenda of Black Minority Ethnic Housing Forum*

The emerging Shared Future agenda will further increase the co terminosity of Community Safety/ ASB and Community Cohesion activities (see Chapter 6 Emerging Themes for Action).

Principle 2. Partnership Working

ASB is often the result of a combination of complex social issues ranging from low educational attainment, social disadvantage, unemployment, poor infrastructure, through to drug or alcohol abuse or mental health problems. As a housing authority, the Housing Executive does not have the appropriate expertise to resolve many of these complex issues. We acknowledge that if we are to effectively come up with long term sustainable responses to anti social behaviour, meaningful partnerships with other service providers are critical. To do otherwise would produce a “sticking plaster” approach, leaving many underlying issues unresolved and possibly displacing the problem to another estate or town.

Partnership involves working across agencies and communities to develop joined up thinking at neighbourhood level in order to tackle more effectively the issues that matter most to residents. In developing this approach the Housing Executive has engaged with a wide range of partner agencies in the pursuance of it’s objective to build safer and more confident communities. Over the past 6 years we have built a very strong working relationship with the PSNI and local councils, two of the key players in the delivery of community safety services on the ground. We have also developed partnerships with other statutory organisations including the Enforcement of Judgements Office, the Youth Justice Agency and the Probation Board of Northern Ireland.

Partnerships play an important role in the delivery of joined up services. No one agency can single-handedly resolve all aspects of ASB and it is with this mind that the Housing Executive, over the next three years will seek to expand the use of partnership working, not only within the statutory sector but also seek out new forms of collaborative working with the voluntary and community sectors also.

Examples of Existing Partnership Arrangements

Partner Agency

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)

Activity

- *Co-funders to a wide range of Community Safety Initiatives*
- *Officer seconded into NIHE Community Safety Team,*
- *Participants in ASB Fora and Information Sharing Protocol*
- *Co-signatories to ABCs*

Youth Justice Agency

- *Support and Diversions programmes*
- *Participant in ASB Fora and Information Sharing Protocol*

Community Safety Partnerships

- *Housing Executive representation on all 26 CSPs*

Belfast City Council

- *Neighbourhood Officer Service*
- *Safer Neighbourhoods Initiative*
- *Partners to Holyland Warden Service*
- *Participant in Belfast ASB Fora (4)*

NIACRO

- *Provision of APAC service individuals*

Mediation Northern Ireland

- *Professional support and advice*

Queens University, Belfast

Magee University, Derry

- *Partners to Community Safety Warden Services*

Enforcement of Judgements Office

- *Service Level Agreement on ASB Repossessions*

Community Safety Unit (NIO)

- *Membership of strategic Community Safety Forum*

Northern Ireland Alternatives

- *Delivery of North and West Belfast Mediation and Community Support Programme*

CASE STUDY

Partnership Working : The Use of ASB Fora

While working with communities is a key component of effective neighbourhood management, tackling ASB requires a joined up approach between service providers. In 2006/2007 the Housing executive introduced a protocol to support information sharing between the NIHE, the PSNI, Councils and the Youth Justice Agency. This approach to collaborative working was further enhanced by the establishment of 4 ASB Fora in Belfast (North, South East and West). These Fora comprise of senior operational decision makers who meet on a regular basis to discuss individual ASB cases, ASB hotspots and local priorities impacting on their communities. By having key decision makers around a table, problem solving can take place and decisions can be made, allowing for responses to be delivered in a very short period of time.

The format of the meetings is flexible and allows, when appropriate, for community representatives to attend. In doing so, it provides communities with an opportunity to contribute to the process.

The model has within Belfast with the establishment of the Greater Shankill Community Safety Network and the Upper Springfield Community Safety Forum. Both Shankill and Springfield models provide a wider inter agency platform which has been extended to include representation from the community and voluntary sectors

Comment

These innovative approaches to addressing community safety amalgamate service delivery with accountability by producing cross agency responses to the identified needs and priorities of local people.

5. Analysis of Reported ASB

All reports of ASB made to Housing Executive District Offices are registered and placed on a computerised system which facilitates casework analysis. This process permits the Housing Executive to apply performance standards to casework and identify potential hotspots and trends across its 35 district offices.

This chapter provides an overview of the extent of ASB reported to the Housing Executive during the period 2005-2007. It should be noted that while the majority of ASB has been defined as relatively low level, all reported cases require some form of intervention to ensure resolution. For the purposes of effective housing management, Northern Ireland has been subdivided into 5 geographic areas: West, North East, South, South East and Belfast. (Chart 2 :Geographic Breakdown provides an analysis of each Areas levels of reported ASB).

Types of reported ASB

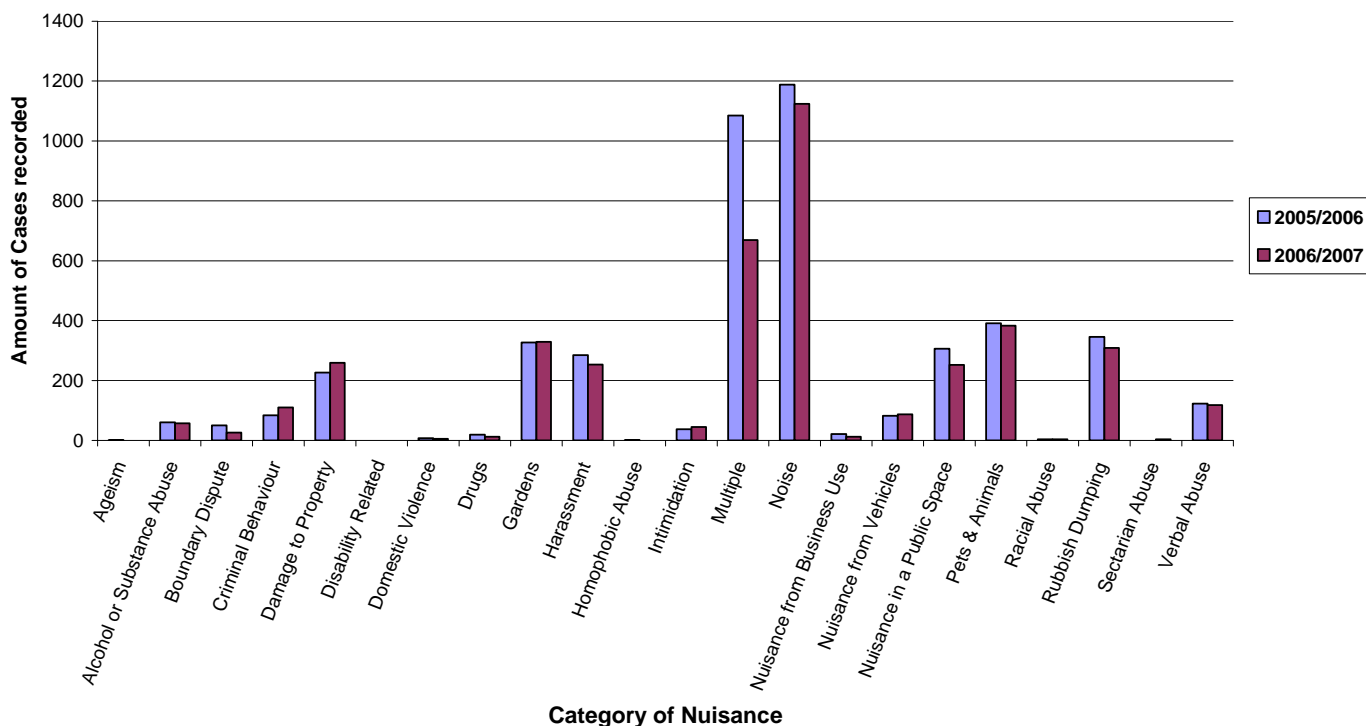
For the purposes of ASB casework processing, all reports of ASB are categorised across 22 types of reported behaviour

<i>Ageism</i>	<i>Multiple</i>
<i>Alcohol or Substance abuse</i>	<i>Noise</i>
<i>Boundary Disputes</i>	<i>Nuisance from Business use</i>
<i>Criminal Damage</i>	<i>Nuisance from Vehicles</i>
<i>Damage to Property</i>	<i>Nuisance in Public Spaces</i>
<i>Disability Related</i>	<i>Pets and Animals</i>
<i>Domestic Violence</i>	<i>Racial Abuse</i>
<i>Intimidation</i>	<i>Rubbish Dumping</i>
<i>Drugs</i>	<i>Sectarian Abuse</i>
<i>Gardens</i>	<i>Verbal Abuse</i>
<i>Harassment</i>	<i>Homophobic Abuse</i>

Volumes

Over the past 2 years, the Housing Executive has received and processed approximately 8700 reports of ASB. Many of these reports have involved multiple incidents of ASB often taking place over a period of many months. Such cases of ASB can often demand significant staff resources.

Recorded ASB by Nuisance Type

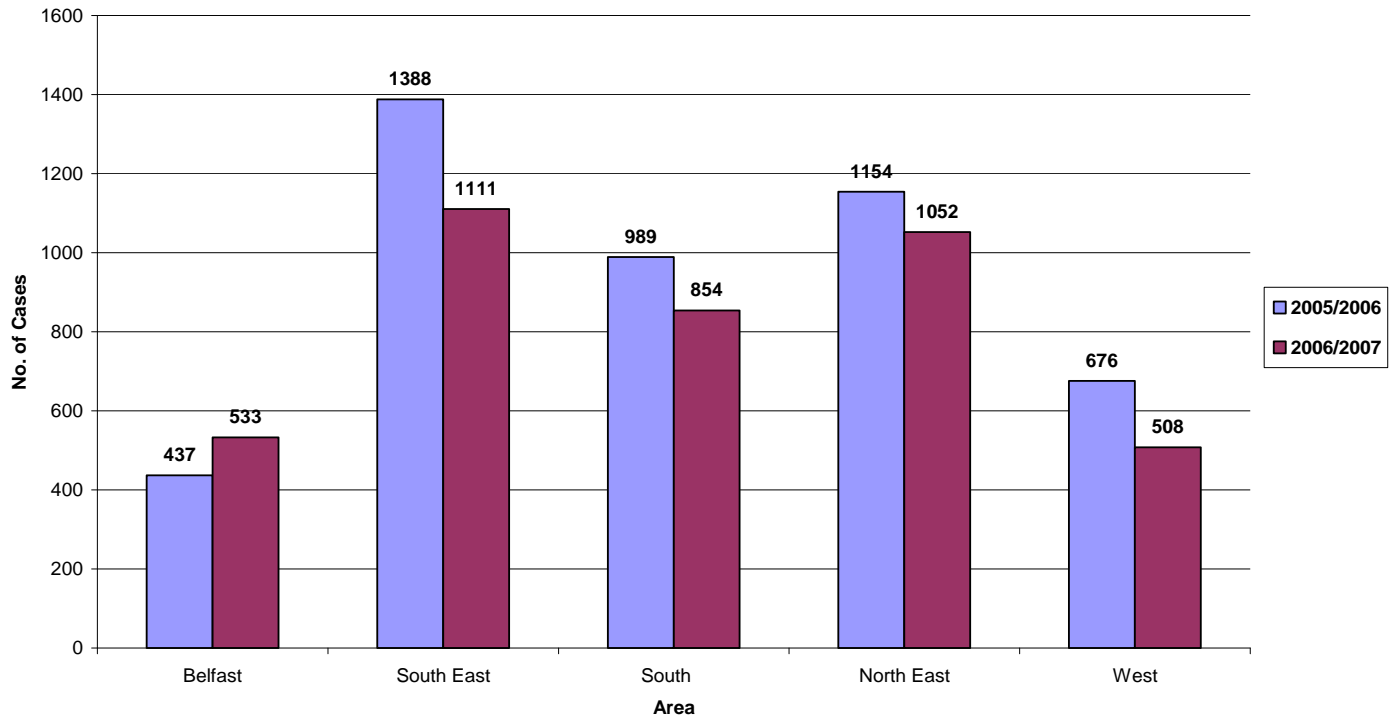


Comment

Reports of ASB made at district office level have remained relatively constant over the past 2 years with noise as a source of ASB representing 25% of all complaints received.

Geographical Breakdown

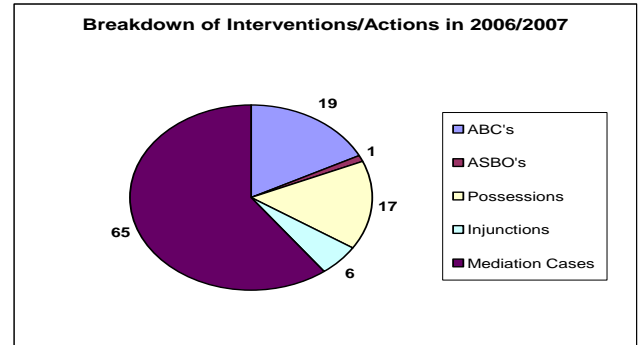
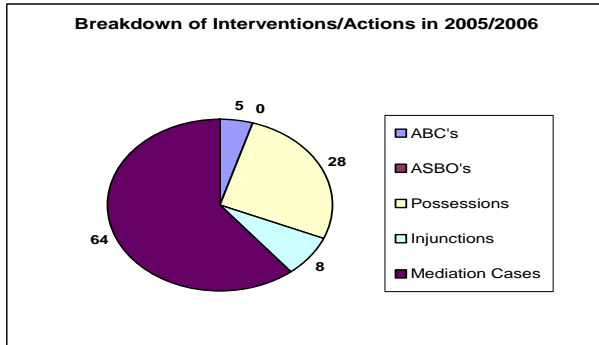
Total ASB Cases recorded in 2005/06 and 2006/07 by Area



Comment

Area based trends would indicate variances in both the number and types of ASB reported. A number of factors have influenced these variances including high levels of under reporting in certain areas where there has been, historically a reticence to report ASB for fear of possible reprisals. Other factors include a lack of public knowledge of the services available and an acceptance of “tolerable” levels of ASB. (see item 6 : Emerging Issues for Action)

Breakdown of Interventions



Comments

The above breakdown of formal interventions is based on the volume of cases referred annually to the CST for action. These figures reflect a small percentage of overall ASB incidents reported to district offices with approximately 97% of all casework resolved at district office level. While the demand for mediation has remained constant over the past two years, there has been a significant decrease in the number of repossession cases from 2005/2006 to 2006/2007. This is as a result of developing greater use of ABCs and in doing so resolving the ASB through agreement without legal action being sought.

6. Emerging Issues for Action

Increasing Community Confidence

While approximately one in five Housing Executive tenants report ASB each year, there remains a significant level of under reporting in certain district offices. This can be attributed to a number of factors:-

- Following 30 years of conflict in Northern Ireland fear of retaliation remains a very real issue for many victims of ASB. It is incumbent of the Housing Executive and other statutory agencies working in the field of community safety, to develop ways of increasing community confidence in the criminal justice system. From a Housing Executive perspective it is important that we not only tackle ASB head on, but we also “get our message out there”. We must develop better ways of working with communities to report on our successes and publicise our stand against ASB. In doing so, in partnership with communities, confidence can be improved and ASB no longer tolerated.*
- Communities often cite the complexity of ASB reporting and evidence gathering as a disincentive to coming forward. Consideration will be given to simplifying reporting arrangements and improved ways of keeping the victim advised of how the complaint is being processed.*
- To this end, the Housing Executive will be developing a Media Strategy in order to communicate more effectively and to ensure that people do not continue to suffer in silence.*

Partnerships and Accountability

- Crucial to future success will be the introduction of greater accountability structures within partnership working. Given the non statutory basis of many partnerships in Northern Ireland, formal accountability arrangements are often lacking. Greater service integration and accountability between agencies, and the effective engagement of communities is central to the delivery of sustainable communities. The introduction of future RPA arrangements at council level will introduce the concept of community planning.*
- Community Planning is one potential mechanism through which the aim of integrated services to address community safety could be realised. A key challenge to the Housing Executive therefore is to develop appropriate and meaningful partnership*

structures, building upon what already exists and taking into account the potential legislative, policy and structural changes which lie ahead.

Responding to Reported ASB

Responding speedily and effectively to reports of ASB will continue to be the cornerstone of the Housing Executive's service. Analysis of reported ASB indicate that approximately 25% of reported incidents relate to unacceptable levels of noise, be that neighbourhood noise, loud parties/ music, youths making noise etc. In 2005-2006, 1188 reports of noise were received and in 2006- 2007 1124 cases were reported. While recent figures indicate a marginal drop in complaints relating to noise, reports categorised under the "Multiple" definition of ASB often relate to noise also, for example, noise relating to alcohol abuse, noisy pets, noise and nuisance in public space. Many of these reports relate to lifestyle clashes or where there may be a low tolerance level to certain types of behaviour. It is in such circumstances that we would seek to expand the use of mediation and/ or ABCs as a means of resolving such problems through dialogue.

Complex Needs

Many of the most complex cases of ASB often involve drug or alcohol abuse, mental health issues or some aspect of dysfunctionality within the household. Such incidents require input from other professionals with expertise in that particular field. Over the next 3 years the Housing Executive will forge partnerships with those agencies who can make important and positive contributions to resolve many of the underlying causes of ASB.

Focus on early intervention through support and diversion

Our experiences over the past 7 years have clearly shown that early intervention is key in stemming anti social behaviour and create more sustainable communities. Much more needs to be done to address many of the underlying causes of ASB, including an increased use of support and diversionary programmes targeted on individuals at risk. While it is crucial that the Housing Executive continues to work alongside communities we also need to give focus to identifying and delivering a new range of partnerships based services targeted, not exclusively on the young, but on all individuals who are identified as being at risk of offending. This will be one of the key priorities of the Housing Executive over the next three years

Information Sharing

Accurate and up to date information is critical to tackling ASB and while protocols are already in place to share information with the police, councils and the YJA, the Housing Executive will be seeking to expand the use of protocols to a wider range of additional statutory bodies.

Community Cohesion and Good Relations

There are clear areas of strategic and operational crossover between addressing community safety, and particularly ASB, and the delivery of the Housing Executive's Community Relations Strategy. The most obvious crossover can be seen in how we respond to attacks motivated by race, sexual orientation, disability or religion.. In addition to developing suitable responses to such incidents we must also work with others on preventative and educational strategies to ensure that such incidents do not take hold or increase. In doing so, the Housing Executive will work with the OFMDFM and key stakeholders to strategically address these areas of crossover.

7. What we are going to do for the next 3 years

In achieving the challenging objectives set out in the previous chapter the Housing Executive has drafted a three year Community Safety Action Plan across three key headings:-

- 1. **Enforcement:** The Housing Executive will work with other agencies and, where appropriate, use its legal powers to stop ASB*
- 2. **Prevention:** The Housing Executive will adopt a more holistic approach to tackling ASB by using an early interventionist approach to offset the potential for serious ASB developing.*
- 3. **Support:** In appropriate circumstances the Housing Executive will work with other agencies to provide access to support and diversionary programmes to reduce the risk of reoffending*

Community Safety Action Plan 2008 – 2011

ENFORCEMENT

EXISTING

*Specialist Community Safety Team
ASB Policy and Procedures
Standardised documentation
Information Sharing Protocols
Legal powers of Repossession
Legal powers of Injunction
Legal power to seek an ASBO
Introductory Tenancies
Test of eligibility for housing assistance*

*Neighbourhood warden provision
Community Safety Wardens in Derry
and Holylands areas.*

*Protocol on Flags and Emblems
Application of HMO Special Control
provisions*

PROPOSED

*To respond to proposed DSD legislation on
demoted tenancies, improved powers of
injunction and powers of closure 2008/2009*

*To respond to proposed NIO legislation on
parenting orders, individual support orders,
exclusion zones etc. 2008/09/1*

*Develop and deliver appropriate training
to support the introduction of new statutory
powers 2008/09/10*

*Expansion of HMO Action Areas to include
Cromwell Road, Stranmillis and Lower Lisburn
Road 2008/2009*

*To introduce a computerised IT system
which will support a speedier and more effective
response to reported ASB 2008/09*

*Develop Inter Community Network to monitor
progress on flags and emblems 2008/09/10*

Prevention

Existing

In House Mediation Service.

This service forms part of the Executive's commitment to intervention at an early stage to avoid further escalation of ASB and potential legal action.

Neighbourhood Wardens are also involved in a range of localised preventative measures through work with local communities and individuals. Wardens offer advice and support to the older and vulnerable households, and in doing so, directly address the fear of crime.

Prevention of ASB is also delivered through a range of physical programmes ranging from grant availability for private sector home improvements, designing out crime initiatives, as well as undertaking community led projects to regenerate specific estates

Delivery of the Lock Out Crime Scheme which to date has provided 18000 properties with improved home security measures

Grant availability for home security measures

An early intervention/ mediation initiative with Castlereagh PSNI

Partnership funding of a range of community Safety initiatives across N. Ireland

Proposed

To determine along term model for the provision of mediation services

To respond to the NIO Community Restorative Justice Protocol 2008/ 2009

To provide a rolling programme of mediation awareness training to all staff 2008-2011

To further develop the use of Neighbourhood Officer Services with other district councils during 2008-2011

To roll out the use of ASB Fora to all district council and PSNI jurisdictions by 2008/2009

To roll out the use of a information sharing protocols to all district councils by 2008/2009

To expand the use of inter agency protocol arrangements 2008- 2011

To produce and issue to all tenants an Information leaflet "Taking a Stand Against Hate Crime" 2008

To roll out the use of PSNI mediation awareness partnerships 2008/09/10

To develop a programme of ASB awareness events targeting students Belfast and Derry 2008/09

Prevention (contd.)

EXISTING

The Executive will use Acceptable Behaviour Contracts as a means of preventing further anti social behaviour, and in doing so, offer support and diversion to the individual at risk.

PROPOSED

To investigate the use of a community based involvement in the delivery of ABCs 2009/10

*To agree with the Housing Community Network a voluntary Neighbourhood Charter
2008-2010*

To introduce a “First Step” mediation initiative in partnership with the HCN. 2008/2009

To review the role of Neighbourhood Warden

*To develop a Community Safety Media Strategy
2008/2010*

To review all ASB information leaflets 2008/09

To review recoding of incidents of hate crime to ascertain potential gaps in information 2008/10

SUPPORT

The Executive works with individuals and families who are either involved in, or are at risk of offending behaviour. We will also offer support to victims and witnesses of ASB as well as signposting a range of specialist agencies for more intensive support.

EXISTING

Partnership with NIACRO in the delivery of the APAC referral service

The Housing Executive provides an In House Witness Support Service to all victims o ASB

Referral mechanism in place with Youth Justice Agency

North and West Belfast Mediation and Community Support Programme

PROPOSED

To consider the development of support services to be delivered through community based programmes 2009/2011

*Develop the use of GIS to map ASB incidents in high density HMO areas
2008/2009*

To consider the expansion of community based ASB support services. 2007/08/09

To evaluate the use of the APAC Programme 2008/2009

Support Pack to be produced for victims of hate crime 2008/2009

*To evaluate the North and West Belfast Mediation and Community Support Programme
2008/2009*

GLOSSARY

Appendix A

ASB

Anti – Social Behaviour

ASBO

Anti Social Behaviour Orders are a civil remedy granted by the magistrates court which prohibit an individual who has acted in a manner that has caused alarm, harassment or distress to others, not of the same household. The minimum duration of an ASBO is 2 years, the breach of which is a criminal offence which can result in imprisonment.

ABC

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts are a voluntary written contract wherein the individual promises not to participate in the anti social behaviour outlined in the contract.

APAC

Assisting People and Communities is a NIACRO delivered support programme

BCC

Belfast City Council

BSM

Basic Security Measures

CSP

Community Safety Partnership

CST

Community Safety Team

CTOS

Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey

DSD

Department for Social Development

HCN

Housing Community Network

HMO

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Injunction

An injunction is a legal remedy prohibiting a person from engaging in anti social behaviour. It is granted by the county court and, if breached, can result in a fine and/ or imprisonment

MNI

Mediation Northern Ireland

NIA

Northern Ireland Alternatives (Community Based Restorative Justice Scheme)

NIACRO

Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders

NIHE

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

NIO

Northern Ireland Office

OFMDFM

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

PSNI

Police Service for Northern Ireland

PBNI

Probation Board Northern Ireland

YJA

Youth Justice Agency

