

Select Committee on Community Safety and Community Services

11th September 2008

Report of the Chief Executive

The Development of the Anti Social Behaviour Unit (ASBU)

Purpose of Report

1. To inform members of the Select Committee of progress in developing the ASBU over the previous 15 months, including the range of activities currently undertaken.
2. To inform members of the Select Committee of plans for developing the Unit's work further.

Background

3. The ASBU was launched in April 2007 and is based within the Community Safety Team, in Dudley Council's Chief Executive's Directorate.
It works to a definition of anti-social behaviour (ASB) as being "behaviour that causes, or is likely to cause, alarm, distress and /or harassment to one or more people not of the same household as the offender, requiring intervention by the authorities". Safe and Sound Strategic Board had earlier agreed that it should be an operational unit.
4. Rather than focus purely on serious and entrenched ASB, the Unit is becoming a multi-faceted service capable of responding to anti-social behaviour from cases where early intervention is needed, to the most serious cases. As well as co-ordinating agencies' actions in areas that suffer prolonged and serious anti-social behaviour, the Unit has specific responsibility for addressing complaints of ASB from owner –occupiers. Council tenants are directed to contact their Housing Manager, and callers are advised that suspected criminal behaviour be reported directly to the Police.
5. The Unit aims to:
 - Investigate and resolve antisocial behaviour complaints made by owner-occupiers
 - Support other directorates and services across the local authority and partners in tackling anti-social behaviour problems that cannot easily be resolved at local level

- Assist in providing evidence for Court in serious cases.
- Ensure a co-ordinated and effective response to hate crime across the Borough
- Encourage and support the engagement of young people in developing solutions to ASB problems.
- Support vulnerable victims of ASB

6. There are three principal strands to the work of the ASBU:

Case based approach

This has entailed:

- Responding to individual complainants, chiefly from owner occupiers
- Co-ordinating the response to Corporate Complaints regarding anti-social behaviour, regardless of tenure.
- Convening and co-ordinating ASB Case Conferences.
- Acting as a Consultation point for Acceptable Behaviour Contracts
- Attending the follow up meetings to Police Reprimand Clinics in appropriate cases

7. Geographic based approach

This entails:

- Responding to ASB hot-spot locations, particularly as highlighted by CDRP analysis of incident data
- Acting as the point of consultation between the Police and the Local Authority where the Police seek a Dispersal Authorisation for a specific area.

8. Thematically based approach

This entails tackling specific aspects of ASB across the Borough, usually as a preventative approach. This includes operating links with;

- Parenting work
- Positive Activities For Young People
- Targeted Youth Support and Integrated Services
- Tackling hate crime and building community cohesion
- Supporting and involving young people in approaches that address local relevant community safety issues, for example, engaging young people in the PACT process

- Inter-generational work projects
- “Target Hardening”, particularly through utilising the Home Security Initiative, to protect vulnerable victims, witnesses, or complainants

9. Staffing and Role Developments

The Unit currently comprises:

- Operations Manager
- Development Manager
- Case Officer
- ASB Projects Co-ordinator
- Senior Out of Hours Witnessing and Case Officer
- 2 Out of Hours Witnessing Officer
- Domestic Security Fitter- Supervisor
- Domestic Security Fitter
- Part- time admin assistant

10. There have been a number of recent relevant developments.

- The transfer of the professional witnessing team (now called the ASBU Out of Hours Team) to the Unit. The re-naming of the team, as well as a revision of some of the roles and functions, has meant that considerable assistance can be given to the management of cases, particularly in complex situations. The team returned to full operating strength in May 2008 after being without two members of staff through long-term sickness.
- Service Level Agreements have been agreed between the team and with DMBC DACHS (Housing), and also with the Directorate of the Urban Environment, both regarding the monitoring of noise. The latter has involved the Out of Hours Team carrying out the monitoring of noise from commercial premises.
- The transfer of the Home Security Initiative to the ASBU.
- The identification of funds for a full-time Case Officer. An officer on redeployment currently fills this post.
- Two periods of temporary secondment of a Police Officer to the Unit. The first involved an officer from the north (J1) between September 2007 and June 2008; the second began in end July 2008 and involves a short- term secondment of an officer from the south (J2) of the Borough.
- The departure of the Hate Crime Co-ordinator for a new post has led to a review of the role, along with the potential links between the ASBU and the emerging agenda on Community Cohesion.
- The revision of the role of the Young Person’s Community Safety Co-ordinator to that of ASB Projects Co-ordinator, thus allowing the post holder to develop inter-generational work projects along with work with adults.
- A set of procedures, timeframes for action and service standards has been developed. These broadly mirror those contained within the DMBC Housing

“ASB Guide to Action”. Discussions are being finalised with other Directorates so as to agree a common core set of practices and standards.

- In tandem with this, an ASBU Customer Satisfaction Survey has been agreed. The first cohort of quarterly results should be available at the end of this calendar year. Customer Satisfaction questionnaires have already been collated for the work carried out by the Home Security Initiative, resulting in a 100% positive rating for returned forms.
 - Between 1 April 2007 and 20 August 2008, the ASBU handled 625 cases. These break down as
 - ASB / Nuisance 590
 - Racial Harassment / 35
Hate Crime
11. The growth in workload has further accelerated during the 2008 /2009 year, with 220 new cases having been received since for the four and a half months since April 1 2008. This compares with 405 for the whole of 2007 / 2008. The first quarter (April- June) of this financial year has the number of incoming cases (136) running at over twice the level of the previous year’s first quarter.
12. The great majority of cases are resolved very quickly, with 252 complainants either being referred on to Private sector housing in the event of noise complaints, or else choosing not to pursue the case following the initial conversation and contact letter. Some 223 of the cases have pursued the matter and have had the case closed with the situation having been improved. The remainder are either ongoing active cases, or have not been able to be resolved through lack of available evidence or the presence of significant blockages to a solution (e.g. irreconcilable differences between neighbours,). Cases are typically resolved by informal methods, usually joint visits or warning letters, or else through the successful engagement of partner agencies- Police, DUE (where environmental improvements are needed) or Housing (where the problems are cross- tenure, and where tenancy conditions of the alleged perpetrator may need to be invoked).
13. The Home Security Initiative has dealt with over 3000 cases since its inception in 2003. Beginning as a single-worker organisation, it has had two staff since 2005. It completed over 480 jobs in the last financial year, slightly up on the previous year.
14. Future Developments

15. A key element will be to integrate the work of the ASBU with “Beat Sweep” activities in areas of anti-social behaviour hotspots. Aligned with this, careful consideration will be given as to how the Unit can fit with the outcomes of a review of PACTs within Dudley.
16. Exploring options and agreeing a way forward for the effective use of partner resources within the ASBU.
17. Identifying ways, with partners, in which the development of work with parents can be more closely integrated with both the preventative and the enforcement aspects of ASB interventions.
18. Securing the casework element to the work programme will be vital as this has a key influence on the public perception of the effectiveness of the Council.
19. The development and implementation of a broader range of intervention tactics, such as Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (increasing in take up within Dudley) and Neighbourhood Agreements.
20. Exploring how private landlords can be engaged so as to prevent and respond to incidents of ASB committed by privately renting tenants.
21. Building closer links with the newly developed Targeted Youth Support service.
22. Contributing and playing a key role in the partnership role to tackling any trends in hate crime and youth gangs that might emerge, as part of an overall community cohesion agenda.

Finance

23. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report at this stage.

Law

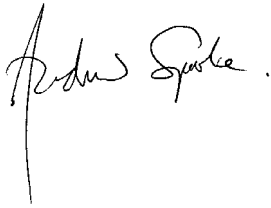
24. Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 the Council is empowered to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive to, or incidental to the discharge of its functions.
25. The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act places a statutory duty on the local authority to work with partner agencies, and to do all it reasonably can to reduce crime and disorder within its jurisdiction. The 2006 Police and Justice Act amended this to also include reducing anti-social behaviour as a statutory responsibility.

Equality Impact

26. This report is in accordance with the council’s equality and diversity policy

Recommendation

27. It is recommended that the committee note the information contained in this report.



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Chief Executive

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