

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE: **WEDNESDAY, 8 JANUARY 2014**

REPORT BY: **HEAD OF HOUSING**

SUBJECT: **ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND NEIGHBOURHOOD
MANAGEMENT**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress of the service in relation to the management of anti-social behaviour (ASB) within neighbourhood housing management.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 In 2013 the new ASB Policy was approved by Cabinet and adopted by the Neighbourhood Housing Team. It's aim was to:

- Prevent anti-social behaviour from happening in the first place.
- Increase confidence within the community to report anti-social behaviour
- Reduce the impact of anti-social behaviour on victims, witnesses and those around them.
- Take decisive action to tackle those who behave in an anti-social manner to stop it from happening again.
- Provide a service that is value for money and which provides sustainable outcomes.

Briefings were carried out with staff over the summer to ensure that all Neighbourhood Housing Officers and Antisocial Behaviour Officers were familiar with the content, and the revised policy position.

2.02 The introduction of the new policy is supported by the promise to tenants of the appointment of additional officers to tackle ASB and by investment in a new case management system – ReACT.

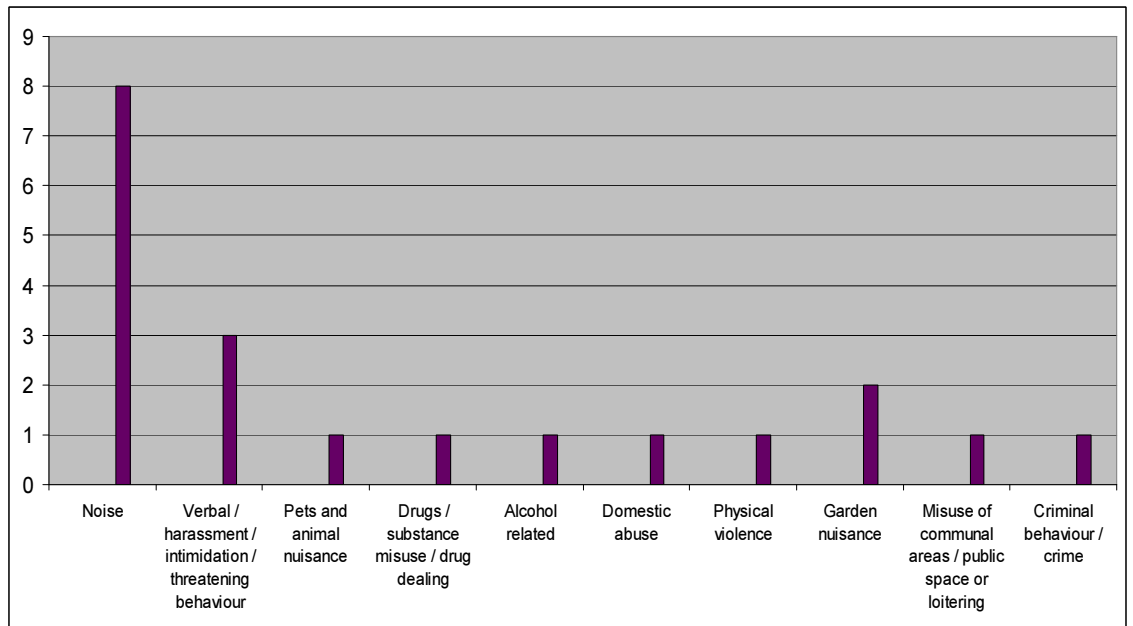
3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 ReACT

ReACT is the IT system that has been purchased by the Council to be able to properly record and manage complaints of anti-social behaviour.

The system was implemented in November 2013 with training for staff taking place throughout November.

Since its implementation on 4th November 2013, there have been 20 reported cases of anti-social behaviour. The majority of these cases have been in relation to noise or verbal abuse.



The following map shows in which areas of the County complaints have been made:



3.02 In addition to being able to see the number, types and geographical location of

anti-social behaviour complaints, the system also enables better management of complaints.

Once a complaint has been made, Officers have key actions within set timescales which they must undertake. The system will remind Officers if actions are nearly due, and will alert Team Leaders if actions become overdue.

By having a computerised system, other staff members are able to advise customers of the progress of their complaint, even if the Investigating Officer is not available.

A further feature of the system is the ability to keep a track of all costs associated with each case. This means that staff time, mileage costs, legal costs etc can be calculated for each case. Ultimately this will be important so that the Council can evaluate whether the service provides value for money, and it will be possible to benchmark the costs of Flintshire County Councils service with that of other landlords.

3.03 Anti-Social Behaviour Team

The Council in its offer to tenants through the Choices Document promised to establish a team of 3 specialist Antisocial Behaviour Officers.

In addition to the existing officer, a further two officers have now been recruited. One of whom commenced employment in November, and the other who is due to start in early 2014. These officers are responsible for the complex, serious and persistent cases of anti-social behaviour, and for arranging legal action to be taken where appropriate.

Both additional officers bring with them a wealth of experience and have a mixture of relevant skills to complement the existing team member.

3.04 Out of Hours Service [Protec]

2013 also saw the launch of the new 'Out of Hours' service for victims and witnesses of antisocial behaviour.

This service is provided by an external supplier, and offers a range of options for supporting victims and witnesses out of hours, including telephone support, on site support and professional witness services.

This has been particularly valuable for vulnerable customers who may require the additional option of being able to report incidents out of hours, and obtain support and advice over the telephone.

In a small number of particularly sensitive cases, provision has also been made for on-site attendance. This means that if an incident occurs out of hours, and the victim/witness requires it, a Protec Officer will go to the victim's home and provide support, and if the incident is still occurring when they reach the address, they are also able to act as an independent witness.

Additionally, Protec also support the work of the Council's Housing Officers by making regular reassurance calls to victims and witnesses.

3.05 Sanctions

The Council has now adopted the approach supported by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2013 to reduce priority for any property improvement works, where the tenant has been guilty of causing anti-social behaviour.

This approach has been adopted in all cases where there has been a Notice served on the tenant, or where legal action has commenced.

The Council is also taking a firm stance on cases where tenants have caused damage to their council homes through either deliberate damage or negligence.

3.06 Case Studies

3.06.1 Leeswood:

On 24th September at 3:30pm, a young tenant of the Council from Leeswood telephoned his Housing Officer to report that a male had come to his property and threatened him in the belief that he had given information to the police about drug dealing. Thinking quickly, the tenant had switched on the video recording device on his mobile telephone, and captured the male continuing to make threats and also ripping his garden gate from it's hinges.

The Council took both the threats to the tenant, and the criminal damage to the gate seriously, and offered to make an emergency application for an Anti-Social Behaviour Injunction to protect the tenant.

Within 24 hours, an application had been made and presented to the Court and the Judge granted an immediate injunction with a power of arrest. Due to the threats and risk to the tenant, the Council had been able to do this without notifying the perpetrator.

The Court then listed a further hearing to provide the perpetrator with an opportunity to defend an application for a full injunction.

The perpetrator did not defend the application, and the Judge gave a full injunction, ordering the perpetrator not just to refrain from threatening the tenant, but also including wider prohibitions preventing him from causing anti-social behaviour to others living in the locality.

Since the injunction was granted the situation has much improved in the area, and the tenant was nominated for an award for his firm stand against anti-social behaviour.

3.06.2 Holywell:

A family in the Holywell area who had been renowned for serious crime and anti-social behaviour for many years were evicted.

The catalogue of incidents perpetrated by numerous members of the family spanned many years, however most witnesses were too frightened to provide details of what was happening either to the police or to the Council.

In the summer of 2013 a serious incident occurred when adult males of the family threatened a young pregnant woman with baseball bats. Although the victim was too afraid to personally give evidence she allowed the Council to submit her statement anonymously. Coupled with the Anti-Social Behaviour Officer's own statement of the family's impact upon residents in the area, and a statement from the local police constable confirming how frightened witnesses were, the District Judge found that the tenants had breached their tenancy agreement and that it was reasonable for them to be evicted from their home.

Eviction is the ultimate sanction, and one which is usually used as a last resort, however in the circumstances, taking into account the help and support which had been offered to the family to change their behaviour and the devastating impact their behaviour had had on the local community, it was deemed to be the most appropriate response.

3.06.3 Flint:

The Council received complaints from residents in a scheme of bungalows about verbal abuse and harassment from a neighbour.

There were a number of complex issues to consider in the case including the alleged perpetrator's mental health, but also the vulnerability of some of the victims and witnesses.

The Council has worked closely both with residents and with the perpetrator and has obtained an injunction to prohibit the perpetrator from causing further nuisance, including restrictions which exclude him from certain areas which may otherwise bring him into contact with witnesses.

Feedback from residents is that this injunction has made a substantial difference and has been adhered to by the perpetrator.

This example is illustrative of the reason why injunctions are often a very effective tool at tackling anti-social behaviour and preventing further incidents. They allow the Council to manage behaviour usually without the need to resort to evicting someone, which can in many cases, simply displace the problem, rather than solve it.

3.07 **Visit by the Minister for Housing and Regeneration**

In November 2013, Carl Sargeant visited the Community House, Holway, Holywell to meet with residents who had experienced anti-social behaviour and to talk to them about their experiences.

Residents described how anti-social behaviour had impacted upon their lives,

of their decision to talk to the Council and the action that the Council had taken to address the problems they were experiencing.

In both cases, the Council had taken legal proceedings to obtain injunctions, and the Minister heard how action could be taken quickly to provide almost immediate protection for victims, unlike legal proceedings for possession and eviction which can take many months for an outcome to be reached,

The Minister was keen to hear about what worked well for victims and witnesses, and what didn't and spoke of his commitment to raising standards for tenants who experience anti-social behaviour.

The Minister also met with the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator from the Council and the Chair of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) to discuss how the police and Council work together to tackle Domestic Abuse,

The Housing Service is developing a range of initiatives to enable better identification of domestic abuse, and improved services for those who experience it. This work is still in its infancy but another local housing provider is also keen to be involved in the proposals and work will be continuing on this into 2014.

3.08 **Plans for 2014**

3.09 Domestic Abuse

As stated above, there are plans being developed to improve services for tenants who are experiencing domestic abuse.

This includes a whole range of initiatives including:

- Training for staff who may be well placed to identify issues, such as on-call joiners, income officers and estate based staff.
- A Domestic Abuse Champion in each team
- In depth training for housing officers and anti-social behaviour officers
- An identifier so that those who may want to disclose domestic abuse, know in advance that the person they are talking to is trained in dealing with domestic abuse.
- Initiatives to improve the relationship between individuals working in housing and those working in domestic abuse.
- Permanent agenda item on team meeting agendas.

3.10 Pet Nuisance:

In line with issues raised by residents as part of the STAR Survey (see

Agenda Item Tenant Satisfaction Survey and Action Plan), and with issues raised by residents both directly through complaints and via feedback at the Tenant's Conference, the Council aims to develop a Responsible Pet Ownership policy.

This will ensure a consistent and fair approach towards the requests that the Council receives for permission to keep pets and animals, whilst promoting the principles of animal welfare and responsible pet ownership, and reducing issues arising from those who do not look after or control their pets.

3.11 Benchmarking

Quarter 4 of 2013/14 will be the first full quarter for which the Council will have data with which to benchmark its ASB Service and this will be submitted to the Housemark Benchmarking Service so that comparisons can be drawn with other Welsh Social Landlords.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01 Members of this Committee are asked to consider the content of this report.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 The introduction of the ReACT system will allow for improved recording and monitoring of costs associated with ASB which will in turn inform future service planning.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 No negative impact.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 The ASB Policy positively impacts upon environmental crime and anti-social behaviour.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 The work around domestic abuse is statistically likely to have a more positive effect on females.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 No further implications, 2 additional members of staff have been recruited.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 Consultation will be required for the development of the Responsible Pet Policy

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Consultation with tenants was undertaken during the development of the ASB Policy through one to one interviews with those who had previously reported ASB, at the Tenants Conference and through the Housing News.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 None

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None

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