
What works? Experiences of Responding to Anti-social Behaviour in Northamptonshire

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aims and Purpose

The project had three main aims, namely:

- (i) To build a picture of the scope, scale and nature of Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) in Northamptonshire;
- (ii) To undertake a scoping exercise and review of the processes currently in place to respond to ASB to determine potential gaps in knowledge and operational practice; and
- (iii) To make recommendations in relation to “what works” when responding to ASB, drawing on existing academic literature and practice.

Defining Anti-social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour is a broad, subjective term often employed to describe a range of behaviours. This subjectivity led to instances whereby what was anti-social in one part of the county was not in another. Those interviewed favoured a “victim-centred” approach to defining ASB – focusing on the harm to the victim rather than “box-ticking” from a list of behaviours.

The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act came into force on 20th October 2014. It must therefore be acknowledged that this research was conducted during a period of change for many organisations tasked with responding to ASB. The changes in legislation meant additional work across the partnership to understand the new legislative powers and to design and implement procedures around this.

Methodology

The main project fieldwork was carried out over a three-month period between October 2014 and January 2015. The report draws upon 31 semi-structured interviews with (a total of 39) stakeholders representing 22 key organisations tasked with responding to ASB in Northamptonshire. In addition, analysis of police recorded ASB incident data over the period 1st September 2011 to 31st August 2014 was undertaken.

(i) Scope, Scale and Nature of Anti-social Behaviour in Northamptonshire

Understanding the scope, scale and nature of ASB is important for a number of reasons. It allows us to better understand the nature of demand, provides an insight into the experiences of victims, enables the measurement of performance and, ultimately, informs the appropriate allocation of resources.

Between September 2011 and August 2014, 101,189 incidents of ASB were reported to Northamptonshire Police, of which 40.6% occurred within the district of Northampton. Of the total number of reported incidents, 46% were categorised as “nuisance”, 37% “personal”, and 17% “environmental”. Breaking this down further by sub-category, the majority (63.8%) of incidents were classified as “rowdy or inconsiderate behaviour”, followed by “neighbour-related” ASB (10.2%) and “nuisance vehicles/inappropriate vehicle use” (8.9%).

Reporting of all incidents peaked during summer months. Over the period studied, 68% of all incidents were attended by a police resource, although this number varied by ASB sub-category. Interestingly, 27% of incidents were flagged as being reported by repeat *callers*.

(ii) Scoping and Review of Current Processes

A fundamental part of the research was to examine the processes in place to respond to ASB, identifying any gaps in knowledge and service provision. In doing so, a clearer understanding of a victim’s journey could be mapped. This involved studying performance at the point of report, information sharing practices, meeting structures, partnership working, referral processes and service provision.

It must first be emphasised that there is a great deal of positive, highly commendable work being conducted in Northamptonshire in relation to ASB. In addition, the passion and commitment displayed by the practitioners and experts who took part in the research was very encouraging. In the interests of building upon this body of good practice, a number of observations were made:

- To facilitate data sharing and analysis, information collected both within and across agencies needs to be consistent;
- Repeat and vulnerable victims should be routinely identified at the point of report;
- Shared, county-wide service principles and minimum standards should help facilitate a consistent response regardless of the organisation reported to;
- Information must be routinely shared between partners;
- Processes to access targeted support need to be easy to navigate and well-publicised;
- Routine analysis of ASB data should be embedded in practice to inform the allocation of funding and resources; and
- Robust evaluation of existing programmes should be encouraged.

These observations were drawn from interviews with a range of organisations in the county. It is hoped by addressing the above points practitioners tasked with responding to ASB may face fewer frustrations and a more streamlined process. In addition, the victim experience may be improved.

(iii) “What Works?”

Within each interview, participants were asked “what works when responding to ASB?” Responses were collated and ten key themes identified (in descending order of frequency mentioned):

1. **Partnership working** – attributes of an effective partnership included: clear lines of consistent communication; routine information sharing; communal aims; and “buy-in” to the partnership agenda. This form of working fosters the development of a single clear narrative around both the victim and perpetrator which reduces the need for those involved to re-tell their story;

2. **Listening** – the acknowledgement that there are always two sides to every story. Constant communication and engagement with both victims and perpetrators was viewed as important;
3. **Early intervention** – “softer”, supportive, proportionate approaches were viewed much more positively than pursuing overly punitive sanctions when events have escalated;
4. **Holistic approaches** – the majority of individuals who engage in ASB were felt to have some underlying reasons for doing so. Support to change and/or address the reasons behind the behaviour should be routine practice;
5. **Shared office space** – seen to increase the level and frequency of information sharing, as well as enabling the generation of new ideas, innovative practices and strong working relationships;
6. **Youth work** – meaningful interventions and diversionary activities for youths. These activities must be flexible, achievable and sustainable;
7. **Engaging with the local community** – identifying existing networks, building meaningful relationships and trust, and recognising community assets. Encouraging the community to play an active part in the problem-solving process;
8. **Frontline officers (particularly PCSOs)** – play a key role in providing an effective response to ASB as a result of their local knowledge and relationships within the community;
9. **Using restorative practices** – bringing a victim and perpetrator together to talk; and
10. **Prevention/“getting upstream”** – in an ideal world, more resources would be invested in preventing ASB. Schools were seen as having an important part to play in this approach.

The findings from this research will ultimately be used to inform ASB policy and practice in Northamptonshire.