

# Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy

2009-2012



Unlocking the potential  
of people and places

Southern  
Housing  
Group 



## Introduction

**Southern Housing Group is committed to building safe, strong and sustainable communities where residents can live free from anti-social behaviour (ASB) and have opportunities to develop and realise their potential.**

We believe that in order to really support our residents we need to address both the causes and effects of ASB within our communities. The Foundation, the community regeneration part of the Group, works in partnership with residents and staff to prevent ASB, while highly trained and skilled staff deal with ASB when it does occur.



# Aims and objectives

All our residents have the right to feel safe and secure in their homes and we will work to ensure this by:

- 1 Working with our partners and our residents to prevent and tackle ASB
- 2 Dealing with ASB quickly and effectively with the minimum amount of distress to our residents
- 3 Taking a balanced approach to dealing with ASB by using a combination of prevention, enforcement and support
- 4 Ensuring that ASB prevention remains a priority for us and our residents.

This strategy sets out our approach to tackling ASB including the following elements, which are explained in more detail below:

- **Prevention and early intervention**
- **Enforcement**
- **Support**
- **Working in partnership**
- **Working with residents.**

## Definition

There isn't a single definition of anti-social behaviour. We currently use the legal definition contained in the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003:

**“Conduct which is capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to any person and which directly or indirectly relates to, or affects the housing management functions of a relevant landlord.”**

We recognise that this definition is broad and have therefore adopted the ASB categories as produced by HouseMark, Communities and Local Government and the Social Landlords Crime & Nuisance Group.

These categories are as follows:

- **Alcohol related anti-social behaviour**
- **Other criminal behaviour**
- **Domestic violence**
- **Drugs / substance misuse / drug dealing**
- **Garden nuisance (e.g. not keeping the garden maintained or dumping goods in the garden)**
- **Hate related incidents (based on age, disability, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation)**
- **Litter / rubbish / fly-tipping**
- **Misuse of communal areas or public spaces / loitering**
- **Noise**
- **Nuisance from vehicles**
- **Pets and animal nuisance**
- **Other physical violence**
- **Prostitution / sexual acts / kerb crawling**
- **Vandalism and damage to property**
- **Verbal abuse / harassment / intimidation / threatening behaviour.**



# Our commitment

Our organisation is committed to providing an effective ASB service, which takes action to ensure residents can live free from the impact of crime and ASB, but also strengthens and supports communities to prevent ASB from occurring in the first place. We continue to demonstrate and strengthen this commitment in a number of different ways.

## Corporate Plan 2009-2012

The Corporate Plan 2009-2012 defines our Group-wide strategic objectives, which are intended to enable the Group to continue its journey of development and improvement. This strategy reflects these objectives and particularly reinforces the Group's commitment to Strategic Objective 1:

**Understand residents' needs and ensure that our residents shape the continuous improvement of our products and services in meeting those needs.**

## Strategic framework

We have developed this strategy in consultation with our residents and by drawing on good practice and legislation. It also reflects the six commitments contained within the Respect Standard for Housing Management.

As well as developing comprehensive ASB guidance and procedures, we have produced a range of related policies to support our approach, including:

- Domestic violence policy
- Hate crime policy
- Starter tenancy policy
- Demoted tenancy policy
- Unacceptable behaviour towards staff policy.

We have also ensured that many of our other services take account of ASB, including community regeneration, lettings, voids, estate management and inspection, and resident involvement.

## Resources

We will continue to ensure that we allocate enough resources to deliver an efficient and effective ASB service, meeting the objectives set out in this strategy. We will do this through the use and monitoring of local and central budgets, including a specific ASB legal budget.

We will also develop an approach to assessing value for money, taking account of costs, benchmarking data, resident feedback and our own performance information where available.

## Supporting service delivery

### Staff structure

All members of staff involved in managing and maintaining our homes are expected to deal with ASB quickly and effectively, while also helping to improve the quality of life of our residents. Along with housing management staff, we have dedicated ASB caseworkers with specialist knowledge and skills who deal with complex and serious cases. We also have caretakers who play a vital role in identifying and responding to ASB on many of our estates.

The work of housing management is supported by a central ASB team, which develops policy and procedures in accordance with legislation and good practice, and provides additional support, advice and training to staff dealing with ASB.

Further to this, the Group's community regeneration arm, the Foundation, strengthens the activities of frontline staff by working in neighbourhoods to identify potential causes of ASB and developing positive activities to address those issues.

### Service standards

The following service standards have been developed in consultation with residents. They provide clarity on what to expect from our ASB service:

- If residents report an ASB incident we think is high risk, we will contact them within 24 hours (this includes serious crime, violence, serious damage to property, hate crime, and domestic violence)
- If residents report an ASB incident we think is medium risk we will contact them within five working days (this includes less serious crime, verbal abuse, high-level noise nuisance, and aggressive behaviour)
- If residents report an ASB incident we think is low risk we will contact them within 10 working days (this includes neighbour disputes, low-level noise nuisance, and other less serious offences)
- We will offer to agree and write down an action plan with residents on all high risk cases
- We will keep residents up-to-date with their case at least every 10 days, unless we agree something different
- We will contact residents when we close a case, giving reasons for the decisions and actions we have taken.

**Please see Appendix 1 for more information on how we prioritise our response.**

### Case management

We have put in place a dedicated ASB case management system, which staff dealing with ASB can access. This means that responsibility for investigating ASB can be clearly assigned and members of staff are accountable for the actions they take. This also enables performance to be monitored at a local level.

### Training

We recognise that equipping staff with the range of skills required to deal with ASB is an ongoing commitment and we will continue to develop our approach to ASB training.

Training includes:

- Ensuring staff are aware of the priority of ASB for our residents
- Providing staff with clear guidance, policies and procedures on our approach to dealing with ASB
- Regularly training and briefings staff on key skill areas, good practice, legislation and Group policies and procedures
- Training staff on the range of tools available to tackle ASB
- Developing ways of incorporating ASB into basic staff training
- Providing ASB legal surgeries so that staff can discuss individual cases with trained solicitors and other colleagues
- Collecting good practice, sharing casework information and holding peer group meetings to encourage joint learning and understanding.

### Performance management

We regularly review our performance on a strategic and local level and will continue to develop and improve the way we do this, including investigating benchmarking opportunities and local mapping facilities.

Examples include:

- Providing quarterly performance reports to the Customer Services Committee and to subsidiary Boards
- Monitoring performance at a local area level
- Reviewing performance at a Regional and Subsidiary Management Team level
- Monitoring customer satisfaction with the ASB service
- Carrying out regular case checks and feeding back to staff on areas of improvement.



# Prevention and early intervention

## Prevention

One of the most effective ways of dealing with ASB is by preventing it occurring in the first place. We have therefore put in place a range of preventative measures which will help reduce the likelihood of ASB.

### Design and development

- Designing new developments and redeveloping sites in a way that reduces the potential for crime and ASB
- Identifying and addressing issues which could cause ASB on major development sites through our risk management approach.

### Letting homes

- Using starter tenancies for residents on new developments
- Using local lettings plans to restrict eligibility for people with a history of ASB
- Using our lettings process to identify potential support needs and working with partners to meet these needs
- Including clear provisions relating to ASB, hate crime and domestic violence in our standard tenancy agreements and leases
- Setting out acceptable standards of behaviour to new residents and what we will do to address ASB in our Resident Handbook, at sign up meetings and settling in visits.

### Working with residents

- Ensuring staff establish relationships with residents so they can develop local solutions to local issues
- Providing and promoting positive activities for young people, such as sport, music and youth forums, as well as helping them to access education, training and employment opportunities
- Working with residents to improve their local environment

- Promoting community cohesion by holding events and carrying out activities which bring residents from different backgrounds together
- Supporting residents to identify appropriate projects to improve their quality of life.

## Case Study 1:

### Building Communities at West Village, Reading

Work in Reading commenced in December 2007 at West Village, a new development for the Group. A survey of residents' circumstances and needs was completed and a report produced. A project group was established with local stakeholders to ensure that the development would take into account community needs. A number of joint meetings have taken place and a vibrant residents group has been formed.

Since then, a successful resident fun day has been held in partnership with developers Barratt Homes, a resident-led TimeBank has been set up, and an educational project has been funded by the Foundation. Further joint projects are already underway including a potential estate-wide Police Community Support Officer project supported by all parties in the area.



## Early intervention

We also recognise that by addressing ASB early, it is possible to stop problems escalating and prevent formal legal proceedings. We will use the different tools available to us to tackle ASB at an early stage.

Examples include:

- Providing advice and assistance to victims at an early stage as part of our basic case management approach, including verbal and written warnings and interviewing the perpetrator
- Signposting or contacting support and advice agencies on behalf of perpetrators before taking more formal action
- Using Acceptable Behaviour Agreements and Parenting Agreements and linking them to the provision of support and diversionary activities where possible
- Making referrals to mediation services at an early stage and where appropriate
- Responding quickly to environmental nuisance, e.g. graffiti, fly-tipping
- Making referrals to external agencies.



## Case Study 2: Phoenix Youth Club and the Northbrook Project

We supported a group of residents in Durrington, West Sussex, to piece together the fragmented community following an arson attack that destroyed a community centre.

Staff supported residents to establish a new youth club – The Phoenix Youth Group. Today they own premises – a new centre for young people called The Northbrook Project. This was created through a joint venture between New Life Church and Phoenix Youth Group to provide activities and help for residents of Durrington. Supported by the police, local councillors and residents, this centre has provided a much needed facility, brought greater stability and reduced ASB in the neighbourhood.



# Enforcement

We understand that prevention and early intervention alone may not tackle ASB. We will therefore take swift enforcement action to protect the communities we serve when needed. We will do this alongside other interventions or alone, where other interventions have failed or are inappropriate.

Examples include:

- Giving perpetrators clear warnings before we initiate legal proceedings
- Seeking legal advice where necessary
- Using all the enforcement tools available to us appropriately, including legal notices, possession orders, injunctions, Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and demotion
- Taking eviction action where necessary but only as last resort.

We will always provide staff dealing with ASB with training, briefings and guidance so that they are able to use the appropriate enforcement tools correctly. In addition we will use our internal referral process to ensure that legal proceedings are only initiated where thorough investigations have been carried out and alternative approaches explored.

## Case Study 3: Swift and effective enforcement

We received several reports of an individual threatening and abusing other residents as well as committing domestic violence. After a thorough investigation and support from the local Police, it was decided that we should apply to the court for an injunction with the power of arrest as well as an exclusion order.

The application was successful and we have continued to support the witnesses who gave evidence by installing CCTV cameras to monitor the area for any breaches of the orders.



## Supporting victims

We know that ASB can have a major impact on victims and that this can be especially serious where victims are particularly vulnerable, e.g. the young, older people, disabled, those with mental health issues. We will support victims to deal with the impact of ASB and work with other specialist agencies where we are unable to provide support directly.

Examples include:

- Visiting residents in their home and at their convenience
- Providing residents with easy ways of reporting ASB, for example by telephone (including specialist Bengali and Turkish lines), email, letter and in person
- Taking reports of ASB seriously and responding to victims sensitively
- Ensuring that victims are kept informed and updated while we carry out thorough investigations
- Considering all possible housing options to respond to the needs and circumstances of victims
- Providing additional security measures to victims of harassment and domestic violence where appropriate
- Identifying and signposting victims to local support agencies
- Making referrals to appropriate support agencies.

## Supporting witnesses

We understand that many witnesses are worried about giving evidence, regardless of whether or not they were the victims of ASB. We will continue to develop our approach so that witnesses feel supported and encouraged through the process, including giving evidence in court.



## Case Study 4: Supporting victims and witnesses

One of our residents reported incidents of verbal abuse, harassment and intimidation from a new resident who had moved into a neighbouring property. On further investigation, it was clear that a number of residents had been subjected to this abuse. However, only one resident was willing to report the problems because they were fearful of the repercussions.

We arranged monthly meetings with the Police, residents and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) to exchange information and provide support and reassurance. All households affected by the problems were offered additional security to their property, including additional locks to their doors, spy holes and security chains. PCSOs also carried out welfare visits in between the monthly meetings.

In court, witnesses were given a separate waiting area to the perpetrator and taken on a tour of the court before the trial to help support them. The police officers involved in the case also agreed to attend court to help support the witnesses.



# Support

## Supporting perpetrators to change their behaviour

We recognise that some perpetrators may themselves be vulnerable and in need of our help so that they can live peacefully with their neighbours. We will offer perpetrators support to change their behaviour either directly or by working with other specialist agencies where this is not possible. By providing this support alongside other interventions, we can tackle some of the underlying causes of ASB. However, we may take enforcement action against perpetrators if their behaviour does not improve or they refuse to engage in the support offered.

Examples include:

- Identifying and signposting perpetrators to local support agencies
- Making referrals to appropriate support agencies, including drug and alcohol support services, and mental health and community care services
- Providing activities which not only divert perpetrators but also develop knowledge and skills
- Considering the disability and vulnerability of perpetrators before taking legal proceedings
- Combining support with enforcement interventions to prevent ASB from escalating
- Developing a clear and specific approach to dealing with vulnerable persons.

## Case Study 5:

### Golden Valley Committee

The Golden Valley Committee, made up of a group of young people aged 11-18, was set up in 2005 after the local area was designated as a Police Dispersal Area, following reports of ASB and nuisance.

After staff investigated, it was clear that, although some young people were causing a nuisance, the response from the older residents could also be perceived as anti-social. The initial community meeting provided the opportunity to open dialogue between residents of all ages. The young people were asked to provide a 'wish list' of how they would like to improve their area, requiring them to research, design and cost their ideal vision, then realistically adjust accordingly.

They set up a meeting with Southern Housing Group, Shepway District Council, the police and local wardens to present this vision and the partnership subsequently supported them both financially and with Governance guidance. This enabled them to establish a working committee to implement the changes they had designed.

With this support the Committee was able to break down barriers between older people and young people. This resulted in a collaboration which saw the construction of the youth shelter – a place for young people to meet away from areas in which ASB could flourish e.g. in alleyways behind people's homes.

As a result, reports of ASB have reduced drastically and there has been a significant improvement in relationships between young and old people.

# Working in Partnership

We cannot work in isolation if we are to tackle ASB effectively, improve neighbourhoods and create communities people are proud to live in. This takes the co-operation and the involvement of many different external agencies. We will therefore continue to develop and improve the ways we work in partnership.

Examples of this include:

- Signing up to local information sharing protocols and sharing information with other agencies where relevant and lawful
- Working with agencies to provide diversionary and positive activities for young people, such as Youth Offending Teams, Youth Inclusion and Support Panels and Connexions
- Participation in, and co-operation with, local and strategic partnerships, such as Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships
- Developing strong working relationships with agencies at a local level to take effective enforcement action, including the police, local authorities and other housing associations
- Working with local agencies, such as Safer Neighbourhood Teams, to provide a visible presence in ASB hotspots to reassure residents and deter perpetrators
- Working with specialist agencies to provide support to victims, witnesses and perpetrators.

## Case Study 6:

### Working in Partnership

We received reports of young people congregating in communal areas and subjecting residents to racial and homophobic abuse on one of our estates. In response, we worked with the local Safer Neighbourhood Team to produce a joint leaflet, providing contact numbers for residents to report any problems, warning that those causing a nuisance would be asked to sign up to Acceptable Behaviour Agreements (ABAs), and advising residents that CCTV cameras were in use. The local police also put up notices advising residents that they would take action against anyone causing ASB and they increased their patrols on the estate. Through monitoring the CCTV and the police patrols we were able to identify three of the perpetrators. They all signed up to ABAs for a period of 6 months and were referred to the Local Authority Youth Intervention Programme (YIP), which provided diversionary activities.

As a result of this work there have been no further reports of harassment and a complainant who had requested a transfer because of the harassment has now put in an application to purchase his property. All three of the young people who signed up to the ABAs have taken part in further positive activities arranged by the Foundation and one young man has since become a role model for other young people on the estate, assisting in football projects and achieving his FA Level 1 Coaching Badge.



# Working with residents

We recognise that we need to involve residents in our approach to dealing with both the causes and effects of ASB. We will continue to work with residents to develop local and strategic solutions to ASB, communicate the work we are doing to tackle ASB, and encourage communities to resolve their problems independently where possible.

Examples include:

- Ensuring staff are accessible and available to residents (e.g. through the extension of mobile working) so that we can understand and respond to local concerns and issues
- Developing opportunities for residents to raise issues of local concern and ASB performance, for example, through Residents and Tenants Associations and Regional Customer Forums
- Setting up neighbourhood focussed teams which involve residents in developing action plans to improve their local areas
- Providing residents with advice and information about our approach to tackling ASB and the actions we take
- Providing this information through a range of ways, including the Group's resident newsletter (Open Door), local newsletters, our resident handbook, leaflets, website and staff contact
- Ensuring that no residents are excluded from accessing the ASB services by providing information in other languages and formats and ensuring that all staff who deal with ASB have attended equality and diversity training
- Publicising our use of enforcement tools where appropriate
- Involving residents in the development of this strategy through consultation events
- Carrying out quarterly satisfaction surveys of those who have accessed our ASB service to understand their experience and using their feedback to improve our approach

- Encouraging residents to attend estate inspections to help identify problems of ASB
- Enabling residents to use self-help options and take action themselves where appropriate
- Ensuring that the ASB service takes account of diversity so that no one is unduly excluded through barriers to involvement, information and advice.

## Case Study 7:

### Resident Involvement

The Peacehaven Youth Forum was set up to reduce levels of reported ASB on the Peacehaven estate through empowering young people to make decisions in the types of activities required in the local area.

The Forum has so far successfully planned a summer activity for all residents of Peacehaven Estate, a summer trip solely for young people and an inter-generational estate fun day.

The Forum also meets regularly with staff and reports of ASB have significantly been reduced.







# Appendix 1

## Prioritising our first response

Anti-social behaviour takes various forms and can differ in its seriousness. We prioritise each report according to our perception of whether a case is high, medium or low risk. We do this by considering all known factors, including the following:

- the seriousness of the behaviour
- the impact the behaviour has on those affected
- the frequency of the behaviour
- the level of risk posed to those affected, including the risk to health and safety
- any vulnerability suffered by those involved (including the alleged perpetrator) e.g. mental illness, learning difficulties, drug/alcohol misuse, the elderly, the young, the disabled.

## Timescales

Depending on whether we believe a case is high, medium or low risk, we aim to contact the complainant within the following timescales. Please note that the following is a general guide and our intention is to assess each case based on its particular circumstances. Timescales indicate first response times only and are based on the information we receive when an incident is first reported.

### High risk – within 24 hours (working day)

This can include:

- allegations of serious criminal activity
- the use of violence
- serious damage to property, e.g. arson attacks
- hate crime
- domestic violence
- graffiti of an offensive nature.

### Medium risk – within 5 working days

This can include:

- allegations of criminal activity, e.g. a property being used to store stolen goods
- verbal abuse and intimidating behaviour, e.g. shouting, aggressive swearing, verbally abusive behaviour, arguing in the street
- more serious noise nuisance, e.g. regular parties where loud music is played at night.

### Low risk – within 10 working days

This can include:

- allegations of disputes, e.g. boundary disputes over hedges, parking, landscaping, fencing
- less serious noise nuisance, e.g. one off report of neighbours rowing
- simple breaches of tenancy conditions, e.g. pet nuisance, car repairs, running a business without permission etc, access disputes.



For help with translations, or if a large type, Braille or taped summary would be useful, please contact the Service Centre.

**Arabic** لمساعدتك في الترجمة يرجى الاتصال بمركز الخدمة على هاتف 0300 303 1771.

**Bengali** অনুবাদ সাহায্য পেতে হলে সার্ভিস সেন্টারে 0300 303 1682 নম্বরে ফোন করুন।

**French** Si vous souhaitez recevoir de l'aide avec vos traductions, appelez le 0300 303 1771.

**Somali** Wixii ah caawimo turjumaan ka soo wac Xarunta Adeegga telefoonka 0300 303 1771.

**Spanish** Si necesita que le ayudemos con alguna traducción, llámenos al 0300 303 1771.

**Turkish** Tercüme konusunda yardım için 0300 303 1683 'den Hizmet Merkezi'ni arayın.

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