

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet Housing Committee – 19 February 2025

Anti-Social Behaviour Service Improvement Plan

Overview & Update

Accountable member:

Cllr Flo Clucas, Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services Accountable

Accountable officer:

Caroline Walker, Director of Housing, Communities & Customer Service

Ward(s) affected:

n/a

Key Decision: No

Executive summary:

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Housing ASB Service, to present the Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) improvement plan to Cabinet Housing Committee, and to provide an update on progress.

The ASB service, alongside repairs, is of high importance to our housing customers, and is fundamentally linked to customers overall feeling of safety in their home.

Building on solid foundations, an ASB Service Improvement Plan with four key priorities has been developed, these are:

- Compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer standards
- Gathering accurate data on customer satisfaction
- Involving customers in shaping the Housing ASB Service
- Develop and deliver an effective communication campaign to improve perceptions

and understanding of the ASB service.

Consultative work has been completed through detailed scoping sessions with key stakeholders to develop an Improvement Programme made up of 5 projects, which are detailed in the appendices. The scoping sessions have been instrumental in identifying outcomes, benefits and interdependencies across the plan.

The plan has been broken down into 5 projects, details of which can be found in appendix i

The project team have adopted a prioritisation approach to decide the order in which the 5 projects will be delivered. The plan reflects available resource and capacity across the organisation, which enables some projects to run concurrently.

Recommendations:

1. That the Housing Cabinet Committee note the details of the improvement plan and the progress made to date in the delivery of the individual projects.
-

1. Implications

1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

Not applicable to this overarching report, however financial implications will be considered on individual projects as required.

1.2 Legal implications

N/A

1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

N/A

1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Ensuring residents, communities and businesses benefit from Cheltenham's future growth and prosperity
- Being a more modern, efficient and financially sustainable council

1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

Not applicable to this overarching report, however equality impact screening assessments will be completed on individual projects within the programme as required.

1.6. Performance management – monitoring and review

Performance against this improvement plan will be monitored and reviewed by the project sponsor.

2. Background

- 2.1. The overall function of our housing- related ASB Team is to tackle incidents of ASB that involve residents of our properties , whether the ASB is perpetrated by, or against, residents that live in council-owned housing and occurs inside, or within the locality of their home.
- 2.2. The ASB, Crime & Policing Act 2014 defines ASB as;
- (a) conduct that has caused, or is likely to cause, harassment, alarm or distress to any person,
 - (b) conduct capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to a person in relation to that person's occupation of residential premises, or
 - (c) conduct capable of causing housing-related nuisance or annoyance to any person.
- 2.3 ASB can generally be broken down into three main categories:
- Personal ASB - is when a person targets a specific individual or group.
Nuisance ASB - is when a person causes trouble, annoyance or suffering to a community.
Environmental ASB - is when a person's actions affect the wider environment, such as public spaces or buildings.
- 2.4 Common ASB reports received by the ASB Team are:
- Noise related nuisance
 - Drugs smells, use or apparent drug dealing
 - Verbal abuse and intimidation
 - Animal related nuisance
 - Damage, rubbish dumping and item storage in communal areas
 - 'Cuckooing' — where a resident's property may have been forcibly taken over for criminal purposes
 - Hate related incidents — where a person is targeted due to a protected characteristic
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Storing or selling stolen goods
- 2.5 In tackling ASB across Cheltenham it is vital that partnerships exist between

residents and those agencies that are responsible for finding solutions to, or enforcing ongoing nuisance and ASB issues.

2.6 The table below details partners that work to address, support and help residents in the tackling of ASB in a holistic and person-centred way:

| Partner | Main Responsibilities | Contact |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Residents | -Report ASB witnessed and work with agencies to help provide evidence. | |
| Police | -Lead on investigation into criminal incidents. | 999 (emergency) or 101 |
| CBH ASB Team | -ASB that affects our tenants and leaseholders. -Issues that occur in, or in the locality of, council-owned housing | 0800 408 0000 asbteam@cheltenham.gov.uk Customer Portal |
| SOLACE | -ASB incidents that occur in Cheltenham, in respect of public spaces and non-council owned housing. | solace@gloucestershire.police.uk 01242 262626 |
| CBC Neighbourhood Team | -Environmental ASB in public areas, such as fly-tipping, dog fouling and graffiti | 01242 262626 |
| CBC Environmental Protection Team | -Noise nuisance in private property, potential statutory nuisance in Council property, air quality & food hygiene issues. | envhealth@cheltenham.gov.uk 01242 262626 |
| Crimestoppers | -UK charity taking anonymous reporting of crime information. | 0800 555 111 |

2.7 Very often, criminal, or anti-social incidents will interlink and touch the operational activity of several partners. The ASB Team have strong partnership working relationships and link up to ensure that the most efficient and holistic response is provided to tackle the issue.

2.8 We do this through the following multi-agency approaches:

- Safer Gloucestershire Partnership
- Cheltenham Community Safety Partnership
- Multi-Agency Problem Solving (MAPS) Forum
- Cheltenham Safer Communities meeting
- Cheltenham Locality Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meeting

- 2.9 Aside from the above, formalised structure, ASB practitioners also regularly hold case meetings to share information and work together to tackle specific issues.
- 2.10 The ASB Team recognise that working in partnership with our customers, whether complainant or perpetrator is key in resolving anti-social behaviour. This starts from the point of complaint where clear time stated actions are agreed for both officer and complainant, to promote the ethos of the customer being an active participant in resolving the issue and to support community cohesion going forwards.
- 2.11 In 2021, the ASB Team initiated a change of approach in how reports of ASB are managed.

Whereas previously a report from a customer of lower level ASB such as dog fouling or noise nuisance would have initiated the opening of an ASB case at first point of contact. The approach that has now been adopted is for these types of cases to go through a period of assessment (two weeks in the case of noise nuisance), where it can be determined whether the matter is likely to constitute a statutory noise nuisance requiring further investigation and referral to Environmental Health for formal monitoring, or whether the evidence submitted shows that the level of perceived nuisance is acceptable, and would not reach the threshold for monitoring, for example if it relates to noise from children playing in the home.

- 2.12 Following this assessment, a decision is made as to whether further investigation is required, and if so, a case is opened and an action plan agreed with the complainant, or whether the behaviour is not deemed to be anti-social, and the contact be updated as such and closed. The reason for this change in approach is to allow the focus of the ASB officers to be on the increasingly serious and complex cases of ASB that are most affecting our communities, which require significant and often immediate intervention, whilst cases which require evidence of a pattern of behaviour over a period of time can be administrated less intensively whilst maintaining a high level of customer service.
- 2.13 The approach to perpetrators of ASB has evolved from a point where an issue was often solely viewed in terms of the behaviour an individual or group was displaying at the time of a particular anti-social incident with a focus on resolving the issue through punitive actions, to now focusing on asking 'why' the behaviour is happening.
- 2.14 To achieve sustainable outcomes in ASB cases it is vital that the reasons for a person or group acting anti-socially are explored in depth, and that factors such as mental health, trauma, physical health, and safeguarding are key considerations for officers when working with perpetrators, and that where needs are identified the customer is supported to address these to enable them to remedy their behaviour.
- 2.15 To support our customers to feel safe and secure in their homes, it is vital that they have the knowledge of how to report anti-social behaviour and the trust and confidence to do so.

- 2.16 During an initial contact with a customer who is reporting ASB, it is vital to establish rapport to understand the customer's desired outcome and then to agree what action will be taken by the ASB officer, and by the customer in terms of providing evidence.
- 2.17 In cases where ASB cannot be resolved through informal means and legal intervention is necessary and proportionate, it is key that customers understand the requirement for formal evidence, and how the absence of direct evidence can limit the likelihood of successful action. The ASB team have a strong track record of supporting customers to provide statements.
- 2.18 In situations where evidence of ASB is not forthcoming, or the evidential burden is not met, the ASB team will:
- Provide hearsay evidence on behalf of those affected
 - Seek to evidence ASB themselves through their community presence during normal working hours and through targeted out of hours work.
 - Deploy mobile CCTV to capture documentary evidence
 - Explore opportunities to secure evidence from partners such as other CBH colleagues, Contractors, Police, Youth Workers and other statutory and third sector bodies.
- 2.19 The under reporting of ASB has a significant impact on community safety. Within Cheltenham there are several groups that are defined as Organised Crime Groups (OCGs). Many of the individuals who make up these groups live and operate in communities where the council have significant housing stock such as St Peters and The Moors and base their activity around drug supply and acquisitive crime. OCG members target vulnerable tenants and create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation in the community. The ASB Team work closely with the police in tackling OCG activity in our communities, particularly in The Moors and St Paul's which are the Gloucestershire Pilot areas for the Home Office's 'Clear, Hold, Build' approach to organised crime, known locally as 'Endeavour'.
- 2.20 To address the challenge of under reporting, the ASB Team work with partners to utilise techniques such as cocooning , where a multi-disciplinary team, in this case colleagues from Gloucestershire Police, Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) , Cheltenham Borough Council, Solace and youth outreach organisations come together to engage with all households in a community to give residents a direct opportunity to be heard, and to share their views about their community, and to encourage reporting of any issues.
- 2.21 The deployment of mobile CCTV cameras at key sites is another tactic utilised to tackle under-reporting. This technology provides an opportunity to capture evidence of ASB without the need for direct evidence from those affected but also provides reassurance to those affected in the knowledge that there is video evidence corroborating their reports.

- 2.22 This technique has been particularly impactful in the Monkscroft community. Following engagement with members of the Monkscroft Action Group (MAG) where several ASB concerns within that community were highlighted, CCTV was deployed at a strategic location to maximise the evidence of ASB and criminality. This provided a visible deterrent to ASB, but also opportunities for the ASB Team to address the impact of specific individuals whose behaviour was impacting those living around them, both through civil remedies and working in partnership with Police to support criminal prosecutions.
- 2.23 Mental health is the most significant challenge that the ASB Team must overcome to resolve conflict and achieve sustainable outcomes for our communities. It is becoming increasingly rare for mental health not to be a factor in a case, with either complainant, perpetrator or sometimes both experiencing mental ill health.
- 2.24 In cases of significant ASB, the ASB Team can find themselves in the difficult position of having to take legal action against a perpetrator who is experiencing mental ill health, in terms of obtaining a civil injunction order to limit their behaviour or a possession order which ultimately can result in them being made homeless.
- 2.25 It is often the case that the ASB Team must take these difficult steps for statutory agencies to engage in identifying treatment or alternative accommodation options. This is a far from ideal situation, and the ASB Team continue to strengthen relationships with mental health teams through monthly multi-disciplinary team meetings, to enable solutions to be found upstream of crisis, whilst also understanding the national picture of a lack of mental health resources and placements.
- 2.26 During the financial year 2023/24, the ASB Team investigated 58 cases and undertook 35 legal actions ranging from applications for civil injunctions and enforcement of those orders, to possession proceedings. During that time three customers were evicted from their homes because of a failure to modify their behaviour and adhere to conditions set out in a civil injunction order.
- 2.27 The regulator of Social Housing (RSH) set out new standards for social landlords on 29th February 2024 and these came into effect from 1st April 2024.
- 2.28 The consumer standards relate directly to the delivery of ASB Services. The Neighbourhood and Community Standard requires landlords to work in partnership with appropriate local authority departments, the police and other relevant organisations to deter and ASB and hate incidents in the neighbourhoods where they provide social housing. The Tenancy Standard requires landlords to provide services that support tenants to maintain their tenancy and prevent unnecessary evictions. The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard which requires landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so they can access services, raise concerns, when necessary, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account.

- 2.29 These standards are the foundations of the five projects which make up the ASB Service Improvement Plan. The highest priority has been given to Project I - Consumer Standards Compliance. This project has centred around a review of the Housing ASB Policy, incorporating consultation with both customers and key stakeholders. The revised policy is currently scheduled to be brought to before this committee and cabinet for agreement in May 2025. Feedback from a customer focus group is contained with appendix i
- 2.30 The next highest priority area for development is the development of transactional ASB satisfaction surveys delivered to customers mobile phones by SMS message at the point that a triage action or ASB case is closed within the QL housing management system. This project supports the priority of gathering accurate data on customer satisfaction.
- 2.31 Prior to this ASB satisfaction data had been captured by writing to customers at the point of case closure to request the completion of a survey either on paper or via an internet link. The response to this has been very low.
- 2.32 ASB satisfaction is also captured through the quarterly Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey carried out quarterly on our behalf by Acuity. This survey has highlighted dissatisfaction with our response to ASB but does not consider whether the respondent has reported ASB to the housing team. Feedback has been sourced from these survey respondents so that unreported ASB can then be investigated.
- 2.33 The transactional SMS surveys are targeted at customers who have had direct involvement with the ASB service, allowing for accurate and timely feedback on casework and outcomes.
- 2.34 The transactional surveys went live in November 2024 and to date 34 surveys have been sent — 25 in relation to triage actions and 9 relating to the closure of ASB cases.
- 2.35 Unfortunately, the response rate to the transactional survey has been far lower than expected, despite it being publicised via social media, and it being detailed in case letters sent out to customers.
- 2.36 To date 4 responses have been received, equating to an 11.7% response rate. A breakdown of these responses is contained in appendix i.
- 2.37 The project group are scheduled to hold a three-month review of the transactional surveys during February 2025. The review will consider on how we can increase the response rate to the survey and encourage answers to all questions. This will focus on awareness raising and the potential to add an incentive such as an entry into a quarterly draw for all those who respond, with the opportunity to win a shopping voucher.

3 Reasons for recommendations

Cabinet Housing Committee require progress updates on the delivery of the ASB Improvement Plan to provide assurances that this programme of work is progressing and is supporting the wider priority of compliance with the Consumer Standards.

4 Consultation and feedback

Consultation on resource and priorities has taken place within the project group, with the project sponsor and with teams whose expertise is required to meet the aims of each of the 5 projects.

Report author:

Caroline Walker, Director of Housing, Communities & Customer Service,
caroline.walker@cbh.org

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – ASB Service Improvement Plan – Overview & Update