

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	10th MARCH 2021	AGENDA ITEM:	
TITLE:	ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR ADELE BARNETT-WARD	PORTFOLIO:	NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMMUNITIES
SERVICE:	HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES	WARDS:	BORROUGH WIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks approval of the updated Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, which has not been refreshed since 2014. The updated policy reflects the change in demands of the Anti-Social Behaviour Team, which include adult exploitation, particularly associated with county drug lines.
- 1.2 The Policy introduces a new procedure that the Anti-Social Behaviour Team will follow. It is designed to make the team's case management procedure more efficient and only tackle those cases in which genuine, significant and/or persistent anti-social behaviour (ASB) is occurring. The policy also sets out the types of issues that are associated with clash of lifestyles and not considered to be ASB. This policy does not include dealing with environmental ASB and noise nuisance outside of RBC Housing jurisdiction.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee notes and approves the updated Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 The primary objective of the Anti-Social Behaviour Team is to reduce severe, and/or persistent anti-social behaviour perpetrated by local authority tenants and private rented/owner occupiers, as well as dealing with area based anti-social behaviour, for example, street drinking and motorbike nuisance.

3.2 The ASB Policy has historically been a Reading Borough Council Housing focussed ASB policy. The proposed policy widens its remit to and sets out an approach to how the Anti-Social Behaviour Team will provide a service to tackle ASB from a tenure neutral perspective and ensure that the service will focus on genuine serious and/or persistent cases of anti-social behaviour.

3.2 The content of the current policy has not been reviewed since the introduction of new ASB powers in 2014 and as such the new policy has been updated to take these into account and formalise the way the team has been working for some time.

3.3 In the last 5 years, the ASB Team has experienced an increase in demand, particularly relating to noise nuisance, drug related activity and the impact of adult exploitation, including ‘cuckooing’ of the homes of vulnerable people. The increase in adult exploitation has resulted in the team working collaboratively with Thames Valley Police to successfully apply for Closure Orders to provide respite to victims and local neighbourhoods whilst a longer-term plan can be put in place.

3.4 The table below sets out a snapshot of the increase in the number of new cases being reported to the ASB Team and the increase in the most reported types of ASB. The number and complexity of these cases continues to increase, and they are incredibly time consuming for officers to deal with. The number of new cases does not reflect the extensive work undertaken by the team to tackle the continuing issues of begging, street sex working and street drinking.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 (YTD)
Total new cases	230	207	261	310	338
Drugs related	51	57	67	98	97
Noise (RBC Housing cases only)	62	37	58	64	77
Closure Orders	1	6	5	19	25

3.3 The ASB Team has also responded to an increase in standard risk cases, predominantly associated with noise and lifestyle clashes. Many of these cases have not progressed in any action due to lack of evidence or reporting of incidence. Each case complainant is updated on their case at least once a

month, even for those cases that are dormant for a number of months. This has had an impact on the team's resources and dilutes the response to the more persistent and serious cases of ASB.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 The new policy sets out how the Anti-Social Behaviour Team will deal with ASB in Reading by:

- Taking effective action to deal with severe and/or persistent anti-social behaviour
- Encouraging residents to report anti-social behaviour by promoting a victim focussed service.
- Setting realistic expectations in relation to how the ASB Team can deal with anti-social behaviour and what types the team will deal with
- Providing support and advice to victims of anti-social behaviour
- Ensuring a partnership approach is taken to tackle anti-social behaviour.

4.2 Key changes to the policy includes:

- Resetting of client expectations and clarification on what constitutes anti-social behaviour
- Renewed focus on the most serious cases as opposed to one off incidents
- a new procedure which provides flexibility to officers to escalate actions to ensure that victims of anti-social behaviour are protected, and that the anti-social behaviour is resolved.

4.3 The new procedure will include a 4-week enquiry stage for standard risk cases to establish whether a case investigation will be triggered. Any enquiries that do not meet the threshold for a case investigation will be closed. This approach will allow officers to provide a more focussed service to victims and witnesses of ASB and give officers more confidence to set realistic expectations from the offset.

4.4 The Policy sets out behaviours the ASB Team will deal with; those actions that are not considered to be anti-social and emphasises that any decision to take legal action is for the Council to make. It states that officers will ensure that when making the decision to proceed with any legal action, it is appropriate, proportionate and reasonable. The updated policy now includes the requirement for officers to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty when considering taking legal action.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The policy will contribute to the following Corporate Plan priorities:

- Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe
- To protect and enhance the lives of vulnerable adults and children.

5.2 The policy also supports the Community Safety Partnership's delivery groups' aims to deal with the following priorities:

- Exploitation - incorporating both Adult Exploitation and Modern Slavery
- Violent Crime and Serious Anti-Social Behaviour - incorporating increasing violence against the person, knife possession and high level anti-social behaviour that has a significant impact on communities.
- Class A drugs - incorporating drug visibility, drug dealing activity from within and outside Reading and drug related anti-social behaviour.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 The ASB Team send out closed case surveys to victims and witnesses who have used the service. Feedback from the surveys support the continuing review of the ASB Team's service delivery.
- 6.2 The majority of the work with communities is focussed towards Reading Borough Council Housing tenants. Updates regarding ASB in local areas are provided to RBC Housing tenants in neighbourhood newsletters, including action taken to tackle ASB and reminders of what action the team can take.
- 6.3 A focus group was held with Reading Borough Council tenants in 2018 following results from the Tenant Satisfaction Survey and the findings from the focus group have helped shape the revised policy and procedure. Further focus groups are currently being held in response to the most recent Tenant Satisfaction Survey and the findings from these groups will be utilised to continue to improve the service.

7. EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The policy will ensure that the ASB Service is actively promoted and accessible to everyone within Reading. The aim is to make it easy for anyone to report incidents, providing a variety of ways to report.
- 7.2 Incidents of a hate crime related issue are responded to within 1 working day.
- 7.3 Tools including diary sheets are made available in a range of languages and witness support is tailor-made to the individuals.
- 7.4 An Equalities Impact Assessment is completed for each case referred to the Council's legal team for enforcement action.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Section 218A(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) requires that local housing authorities have in place:
- (a) A policy in relation to anti-social behaviour and
 - (b) Procedures for dealing with occurrences of such behaviour.

This statutory duty has been in place since 2004.

- 8.2 Section 218A (4) requires that the local housing authority must from time to time keep the policy and procedures under review and when it considers appropriate, publish a revised statement.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The ASB Team has a small special measures budget of £15000, which is ring-fenced for RBC Housing cases. This is utilised for witness support and costs associated with attending court, mediation, small remedial measures to reduce the impact of ASB, for example, fencing, soft door closures and use of The Noise App.
- 9.2 There will be no additional financial implications by implementing this revised policy.

These financial implications were reviewed by Mark Jones, Strategic Business Partner on 4/2/21.

10 BACKGROUND PAPERS