

**Overview and Scrutiny
Select Committee No 3
Review of Neighbour Nuisance**

**Select Committee No 3
April 2006**

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1 Executive Summary

This review was undertaken as a result of increasing concerns expressed by Elected Members about the level of neighbourhood nuisance and anti-social behaviour (NN/ASB) that was being reported to them. It is also a key priority for the government, the council and its partners.

Because of this huge agenda and the many initiatives already in place it was necessary to ensure this review remained focused on specific areas of NN/ASB. These are clearly identified in the terms of reference shown at Section 3. The Select Committee was mindful, however, that the review should take account of:

- The effectiveness of reporting and feedback arrangements
- The efforts to encourage people to report incidents of NN/ASB
- How well the range of support and advice services are promoted
- The effectiveness of partnership working

They were of the view that members of the public subjected to NN/ASB are not always fully aware of the wide range of services and support available to them. The committee considers a key priority to be greater promotion to improve public awareness of these services for all agencies involved.

NN/ASB occurs in all areas across the borough both in the private housing sector and the public housing sector housing. It can range from the minor incidents such as young children playing ball across other people's gardens to the extreme cases involving drug dealing, violence and intimidation.

The Community Protection Department will normally handle complaints of NN/ASB in the private sector. This is done through either Environmental Heath Sector or the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit. Wigan and Leigh Housing will respond to complaints from council house tenants. Criminal and other serious anti-social activity will be referred to the Police.

The identification of the nature and types of NN/ASB complaints are now recorded and analysed on a regular basis. However, analysis of NN/ASB complaints on a geographical basis is not yet possible. But this is expected to be in place later in 2006.

The Select Committee heard evidence from the key agencies involved and were of the opinion that a great deal of good work is being done to tackle NN/ASB. There is evidence that the different agencies involved are working in a collaborative manner and striving to ensure their combined efforts make a difference.

The Township Community Safety Groups are proving to be effective in bringing together the various agencies involved in tackling problems of NN/ASB. They are providing a forum for local issues to be raised with the appropriate bodies and for informing wider corporate initiatives.

Community Protection Department

The department uses a variety of methods to promote its services. However, it recognises more could be done in this area. There is a need to improve the promotion of the service and thereby increase public understanding and awareness of how the department can help.

The provision of dedicated NN/ASB website would make a significant improvement but remains an outstanding issue. Limited IT resources have delayed this development but it is anticipated this will be addressed by summer 2006.

The department also recognises that further work needs to be done to ensure that complainants are kept regularly informed of progress regarding their complaint.

Community Protection department have well-established procedures for processing complaints. Current performance indicates high levels of satisfaction by those who have found it necessary to complain to the department about NN/ASB.

Existing record systems do not readily provide for detailed geographical analysis of NN/ASB. However, a new computer system with GPS capability has recently been implemented and will be able to provide more detailed analysis of incidents and location of NN/ASB

The department working with its partners has developed an Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy for the borough. This was approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 16 March 2006.

Wigan and Leigh Housing (W&LH)

Wigan and Leigh Housing have a dedicated Tenancy Relations Team to investigate and resolve neighbour nuisance and anti-social behaviour. The team have been trained and are experienced to deal with all types of NN/ASB from minor complaints to those requiring strong enforcement action.

They have a dedicated web-site which provides extensive guidance and advice for tenants who may be subject to such nuisance. This guidance and advice is also freely available at each Area Housing office.

A new 46 page Booklet 'Living with anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisance' has recently been published. This also provides comprehensive guidance and support.

Wigan and Leigh housing provide a wide range of options and solutions to tackle the problem of NN/ASB. These may include:

- Provision of security cameras
- Stronger and more secure door and window locks
- Fire blankets

In addition, the use of warning letters, Good Behaviour Agreements, ASBO's and a mediation service are all used as appropriate.

While it is accepted that the guidance, advice and support services available are comprehensive, it is recognised there needs to be greater promotion of the work of the Tenancy Relations Team. This is particularly so with regard to the support services available for those people who fear any form of reprisal as a result of reporting a nuisance problem.

Customer Satisfaction surveys are to increase significantly from the current 10% to 100%. This is anticipated to substantially improve the accuracy of satisfaction levels and ultimately lead to service improvements.

Greater Manchester Police

The Select Committee recognised that the police service are working hard with all their partners in tackling NN/ASB. However, concerns were expressed at the arrangements for communicating with the public.

Concerns were also expressed at the lack of feedback and regular contact with members of the public and elected members (regarding their complaint). Evidence suggested inconsistency of approach by the police in different areas of the borough. GMP accepted this as an area for improvement and are currently working to address this concern.

A new Community Volunteer scheme is being piloted in Wigan and other parts of the GMP region. It is anticipated this will enhance the support made available to victims and witnesses of NN/ASB.

Close collaborative working and sharing of information between GMP and Wigan and Leigh Housing was evident in the use of ASB1 Forms. This information often provides W&LH with sufficient evidence to implement serious action against unsuitable tenants.

Local Area Agreement (LAA)

Wigan's LAA contains a number of plans and strategies which are anticipated to impact on NN/ASB. These include:

- Regular strategic assessments to help inform and co-ordinate the resources of the Community Safety Partnership, and
- the introduction of a range of positive interventions, such as targeting hotspots, targeting of prolific offenders and the continuing use of Contact Cards

In order to take forward many of these LAA initiatives a new post of Reassurance Co-ordinator has been recruited to the Community Protection department. The post will co-ordinate the work of the Community Safety Partnership to:-

reduce public perception on NN/ASB, crime and drugs, and
increase the public's confidence in the police and partnership agencies

2 Recommendations

1 (a) Promotion of services

Members of the public need to be made fully aware of the full range of service which the Council and its partners can provide in relation to NN/ASB. All three main partners accept this and recognise more needs to be done.

Equally, people need to be given greater assurance that adequate protection, and support arrangements can be provided should they report an incident of NN/ASB. This particularly important for those who perceive or receive threats of reprisal or intimidation.

The review identified a great deal of work being undertaken in this area, but consider further promotion and improvement in overall communications can be achieved.

Recommendation 1(a)

It is therefore recommended that the Community Protection Department, W&LH and GMP agree a course of action to improve public awareness of their services.

1 (b) Feedback and progress reporting

Similarly, the three parties concerned accept that providing regular feedback and progress reports to people who have made complaints of NN/ASB should be improved. This may require changes to the methods of recording of actions taken, feedback given and progress reports presented. Additional support to employees in the form of training and guidance may also be necessary to achieve this.

Recommendation 1(b)

It is therefore recommended that the Community Protection Department, W&LH and GMP make arrangements to ensure feedback and progress reporting becomes embedded in day to day operational services.

2 Local Lettings Policies

The development of Local Lettings policies can play a part in addressing social and management problems on estates. They can be used where the local situation is considered exceptional. And the objectives aimed at preventing or tackling social problems are clearly defined.

It is recognised that local lettings policies focus on community mix and demographics, and hard-to-let properties but do not solely look at ASB. They should also avoid any form of direct or indirect discrimination.

However, the Select Committee believe that the use of local lettings policies, used in conjunction with other initiatives, can play a significant role in addressing the problems of NN/ASB

Recommendation 2

It is therefore recommended that W&LH explore the feasibility of introducing local lettings policies where appropriate and in accordance with relevant legislation and good practice.

3 Notice of Possession - Delegation of power to W&LH

This process of serving Notice of Possession requires careful handling and adequate and robust evidence. Responsibility for final authorisation in all cases rests with the Director of Community Protection.

W&LH are of the view this is one stage too many and can cause unnecessary delays in the process. They suggest that the process can be improved by delegating this responsibility to the Chief Executive of W&LH (for those cases where W&LH have a direct interest).

The Select Committee recognise this is a difficult area and one which has many pitfalls if the process is handled badly. However, it believes this proposal has the potential to improve the service and better serve the communities affected.

Recommendation 3

It is therefore recommended that the Director of Community Protection and Chief Executive of W&LH jointly investigate this proposal and report their findings to their appropriate Panels.

4 Formation of a Neighbour Nuisance Standing Select committee

The Select Committee in undertaking this work received extensive information and understanding of the very difficult area of NN/ASB. And because of the widespread nature of this problem considered that their experience gained from the review should be used to good effect and not lost.

Consequently they proposed the establishment of a small group of members to monitor NN/ASB. They would meet on a regular basis to monitor the work of all agencies in tackling NN/ASB. They would also check and monitor progress on the many initiatives proposed to tackle NN/ASB.

Recommendation 4

It is therefore recommended that the appropriate service panels be consulted on this proposal and report back their observations.

5 Public consultation

During the review the Select Committee met with a selected group of residents. This group consisted of people who had recently found it necessary to submit a report of NN/ASB. The focus group discussed many areas of concern about service run by the council and its partner agencies.

However, the majority of those attending left the meeting expressing positive opinions about the council. This was largely as a result of being invited to and allowed to speak at the meeting.

The Select Committee are mindful of the difficulties of arranging and managing such meetings. However, they considered that more should be done to encourage people to express their views about how the council and its partners handled their report of NN/ASB. One option may be greater use of the TCSG forum, whereby local people who had made a report of NN/ASB in the preceding 12 months would be invited to attend the TCSG to discuss action and progress.

Recommendation 5

It is therefore recommended that the Director of Community Protection investigate how members of the public (who have reported NN/ASB) can be consulted and their views obtained.

GM Police only

6 Graded Response times

This 5 tier graded response scheme was introduced to ensure effective use of police resources. It continues to be a source of complaint and concern for many people who contact the police.

The Select Committee understands the reasons for this approach but believe members of the public would be better served if response times were improved. And at the same time people made more aware of the graded response system and how well the police perform against these response times.

Recommendation 6

It is therefore recommended that GMP explore ways of improving public confidence, awareness and understanding of the Graded Response System and its associated response times.

7 Community Volunteer Scheme

This proposed scheme planned for introduction in 2006 aims to increase community reassurance by drawing on the skills and experience of local volunteers to establish closer links with the community.

The Select Committee recognise this as another initiative which will help build public confidence in the police and at the same time help reduce the fear of crime and serious ASB.

Recommendation 7

It is therefore recommended that GMP report what progress is being made to implement this scheme in the borough.

3 Terms of Reference

The review of neighbourhood nuisance was undertaken as a result of increasing concerns expressed by Elected Members about the level of neighbourhood nuisance and anti-social behaviour that was being reported.

The issue of NN/ASB is a key priority for the government, the council and its partners.

To ensure the review was effective it was necessary to ensure there was a clear focus for the review. This would serve a number of purposes not least to make sure the review did not duplicate any previous or current projects which have been undertaken in this area.

Consequently the Select Committee agreed the following terms of reference for the review.

Aim of Review

1. To identify what constitutes NN/ASB in the overall context of anti-social behaviour. However, the review should not focus on any particular category of NN/ASB as it is recognised that nuisance can be a subjective problem.
2. To identify the problem of NN/ASB across the borough, taking account of the pattern and frequency of incidents on:
 - Council estates
 - Other social housing sector and
 - Private housing sector
3. To evaluate the processes involved in the resolution of NN/ASB.
4. To take account of other related work which has been done already or is being undertaken around the issue of NN/ASB with the purpose of avoiding duplication.

Scope of the review

1. To understand who is affected by NN/ASB
2. To identify the scale and types of NN/ASB and whether these are increasing or decreasing
3. To identify the geographical spread of any such nuisance and at the same time highlight identified 'hot-spots'
4. To explore what is being done by the Council and its partners to address the issue, particularly around the processes involved in the resolution of NN/ASB. This would take account of:

- What reporting and feedback channels currently exist
 - The effectiveness of these channels
 - What is done to encourage people to report nuisance, including the accessibility and promotion to the general public The effectiveness of the partnership working
 - How well the services are promoted, and
 - How people are encouraged to report nuisance issues
- 5 To identify good practice locally and nationally
- 6 To understand the level of resources available to tackle nuisance

Outcomes sought from the review

- An assessment of the effectiveness of current strategies and actions implemented to tackle NN/ASB
- The evaluation of good practice that has been shown to be effective in addressing NN/ASB
- To make recommendations, where appropriate, to assist in reducing the level of NN/ASB

4 Current Position

4.1 What is neighbourhood nuisance?

In June 2005 the Wigan & Leigh Community Safety Partnership received the Wigan Borough Strategic Assessment. Section 6 of the report dealt with the issue of NN/ASB in the borough. Table 1 below lists the most common types of NN/ASB as identified by the respondents to the 2004 Citizen's Panel survey.

Table 1 – Types of Neighbourhood Nuisance

Type of Neighbourhood nuisance	% of respondents
Vandalism, graffiti and deliberate damage to property	41%
Insulting, pestering or intimidating behaviour	32%
Teenagers hanging around the streets	27%
Rubbish or litter lying around	22%
Dog fouling	22%
Other	21%
Noisy neighbours or loud parties	13%
People being drunk and rowdy in public places	12%
Motor bikes/off road bikes causing noise/nuisance	7%

Wigan & Leigh Housing – Annual Report on Neighbourhood Nuisance

Wigan and Leigh Housing report on NN/ASB on annual basis. During the period 2004/05 they received a total of 1242 complaints of NN/ASB. Of these 748 were in the Leigh Homes area 494 in the Wigan Homes area.

Table 2 below indicates the most common types of nuisance experienced by Wigan and Leigh Homes during the period 1 April 2004 and 31 March 2005.

Table 2 - Types of Neighbourhood nuisance

Type of Neighbourhood nuisance	Leigh homes	Wigan homes
Noise	40%	41%
Children	18%	12%
Violent/abusive behaviour	16%	14%

Animals	9%	8%
Vandalism	3%	2%
Cars	3%	1%
The condition of the property	3%	7%
Miscellaneous complaints	2%	4%
Use of the premises	1%	4%
Bonfires	1%	1%

As can be seen from the above tables there are differences in how NN/ASB is recorded and reported. Wigan and Leigh Housing record actual NN complaints received by them, whereas the Community Safety Partnership use figures based on residents perceptions.

At present there are no arrangements in place to identify the detailed geographical nature of NN/ASB. However, a new computer system currently being introduced by Community Protection Department will be able to identify NN/ASB hotspots and localised incidents more effectively.

Anecdotal evidence from the Deputy Director of Community Protection suggests that most NN/ASB occurs in the most deprived areas of the borough. Although it is recognised that many private sector estates suffer from regular NN/ASB incidents.

4.2 The Role of Wigan and Leigh Housing

The Tenancy Relations Team deal with complaints of NN/ASB for W&LH. Members of the Team are trained to deal with all NN/ASB cases ranging from minor complaints to cases requiring strong enforcement action. They also take responsibility for providing support and assistance to victims and witnesses as well as informal mediation and counselling.

There is a focus on preventative work in that applicants for housing are required to provide character references. Tenancy agreements are clear about the responsibilities of tenants, their families and visitors. Evictions and other strong enforcement actions are seen as a last resort but are used as necessary.

The possibility of introducing local lettings policies are currently being investigated as another means of preventative action.

Wigan and Leigh Housing have developed an effective range of policies and procedures for dealing with NN/ASB. These were developed in conjunction with the Neighbour Nuisance Steering Group which consisted of a representative group of tenants and officers.

A dedicated NN/ASB website was introduced in December 2004. It contains a great deal of guidance and advice to anyone who believes they have been a victim of NN/ASB. The interactive nature of the website allows tenants to report incidents more easily.

Other options available to report NN/ASB and include:-

- visits to area housing office
- telephone calls and letters
- nuisance hotline, and
- by e-mail

Process and Procedure for dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour and Neighbourhood Nuisance

The W&LH interactive website provides comprehensive procedural guidance to help tenants deal with neighbour nuisance and other forms of anti-social behaviour. It outlines how they will respond to individual reports, how they will support tenants once a complaint has been received and the options available to tackle the problem.

More recently they have produced a 46 page booklet titled **Living with anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisance**. It provides guidance and advice on a range of support and services available, including

- Victim and witness support
- The use of professional witnesses
- Types of action which can be taken, for example, mediation, warning letters, legal proceedings, ASBO's and possession orders

- Actions to prevent NN/ASB such as use of character references for new housing applicants

Some of the more specific examples of how the service operates and the interventions they may take are summarised below.

Response - Complainants can expect a response within 24 hours or if case is urgent within 2 hrs, normally via a telephone call.

Working with the Police – this joint working can often lead to criminal convictions rather than civil convictions. The use of **ASB Form 1** is proving extremely useful to W&LH in securing successful action against tenants who persistently violate tenancy agreements.

Support Available - For tenants who have been subject to anti-social behaviour/neighbour nuisance a range of support arrangements are available. These may include provision of:

- security cameras
- locks
- fire blankets
- mobile phones; and
- relocating families when advised to by the Police.

Interventions Available – a range of other interventions to tackle neighbour nuisance are used and include:

- **Mediation** is offered in many instances as means to resolve the issue at an early stage. However, despite its success, take up is low. The reasons for this low take up are unclear but given its success rate the service should be given further promotion.
- **Warning letters** – starts at a low level to remind people of their responsibilities and can escalate to a final warning letter prior to legal action being taken.
- **Good Behaviour Agreements (GBA)**– are used for specific types of anti-social behaviour and/or neighbour nuisance, including, threatening behaviour, criminal behaviour, harassment and sub-criminal behaviour. Targeted support using the Positive Action Team is provided with the GBA in place for a period of 6 months. Breaches of the GBA may result in higher level sanctions, such as, application for ASBO, commencement of possession proceedings and other legal action dependent upon the nature of the behaviour. Although GBA are shown to have some success the benefits tend to be short term as problems reoccur once the agreement period finishes.
- **Anti-Social Behaviour Orders** - WALH publicise the ASBs they take out via the WALH website. They also text tenants and other members of the community to make them aware that an ASB has been taken out and send leaflets to homes in the locality.

In order to demonstrate their commitment to tackling NN/ASB, W&LH

publicise successful actions they have taken in dealing with such problems. They do this in a number of ways:

- Showing current ASBO's on the website
- Leaflet drops in the locations the orders apply to
- Press releases in the national and local press
- By text message to tenants with mobile phones

Other actions they have taken to raise understanding and awareness include:

- Production of a comprehensive, clear and accessible statement of policies and procedures on NN/ASB
- Demonstrating that they use the full range of legal remedies available including mediation, injunctions, ASBOs, possession proceedings etc.
- Establishing working arrangements with the local courts
- Regular recording and monitoring of NN/ASB and the review strategies and policies to improve the service as necessary

Customer Satisfaction

Wigan and Leigh Housing carry out Customer satisfaction surveys on a regular basis.

During 2004/05 64% of respondents said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the help and advice given regarding their complaint.

Twenty seven (27%) said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the help and advice given. The remaining 9% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Neighbourhood Nuisance and Anti-Social Behaviour are emotive and difficult issues and it is sometimes difficult to give members of the public the answers they want to receive and this can at times influence the level of satisfaction.

As part of their plans to improve the service the Tenancy Relations Section will increase the number of customer satisfaction surveys carried out. Currently they survey 10% of cases which have closed but this will increase to 100%. They will also be sent at the time the case is closed rather than at specific periods of the year. It is anticipated this will provide more accurate evidence of satisfaction levels as perceptions of the service will be still fresh in their minds.

Other planned improvements

The Tenancy Relations Section are looking to implement further improvements to the service and for 2006 are planning to:-

- review the current organisation structure and reporting mechanisms for tenants
- build the team capacity for dealing with intensive support work with

residents

- raise the awareness of the Tenancy Relations team and the services it provides
- review the use of technology for evidence gathering
- improve and develop the website

4.3 The Role of Community Protection Department

The Community Protection Department has responsibility for the Anti Social Behaviour Unit (trouble with youths on the street, Township Community Safety Groups) and Public Health Services (Private dwellings).

The Community Protection department currently does not have a dedicated website for NN/ASB. This is disappointing given the increasing use of the internet to provide information and guidance about our services. This is particularly important as NN/ASB often occurs outside normal office hours.

Attempts have been made to develop a site but limited IT resources have contributed to delays in successful implementation. It is anticipated a new website will be in place by summer 2006.

The Department promotes the services they offer using a range of different outlets. This includes articles in Borough Life, features in the local press and leaflet drops in selected areas. The two recent leaflet drops, funded by all TCSG, are being delivered to around 80,000 households in the borough.

Neighbour nuisance and anti-social behaviour is handled by the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit working and supporting the Community Safety Partnership. They do so by both servicing the Township Community Safety Groups and by direct action in the community. This can take the form of issuing Contact Cards, negotiating Good Behaviour Agreements (GBA's) and ultimately, the serving of Anti-Social Behaviour orders (ASBO's).

Contact Cards, Good Behaviour Agreements and ASBO's

The process is intended to be a range of escalating sanctions. Those who fail to improve behaviour at Contact Card stage will become subject to Good Behaviour Agreement. Breaches of GBA's are likely to result in referral to the Multi Agency Case Conference led by the Youth Offending Team (YOT). This may result in other interventions being applied such as, direct one-to-one work with the individual and a member of the YOT.

Failure to improve at this stage will result in a referral to the ASB Orders Group.

A new IT system called FLARE has recently been introduced to provide a case management facility for NN/ASB. This information system is now available to W&LH and will shortly be available to GMP and their satellite stations.

In seeking to identify trends in NN/ASB it was explained that current computer system is unable to provide this type of information. A replacement system is imminent which will allow geographical queries but it will take up to 12 months to get all the data into the system. The new system will have GIS functionality allowing the department to better target door-to-door leaflet drops.

It was explained that experience shows that problems of NN/ASB tend to occur in the more deprived areas but was recognised that complaints are received from across the whole of the borough.

Over the past months the department has been working with all its partners to develop an Antisocial Behaviour Strategy for the borough. This was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 16 March 2006 who recommended that the Council adopt the Wigan and Leigh Community Safety Partnership's Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy 2005-2008.

The strategy is wide-ranging and highlights the key priorities to tackle NN/ASB during the next 2 to 3 years. The Select Committee was pleased that the strategy addresses many of the issues raised by this review.

Noise Nuisance

The Community Protection department has well-established procedural arrangements in place for dealing with noise nuisance. They are also used for handling other complaints received by the department.

The Select Committee was given details of the range of strategies and options used by the department when dealing with NN/ASB. These include the use of high tech equipment to record noise and undertake surveillance. The department use the full range of powers available in dealing with NN/ASB including, prosecution, seizure of equipment and issuing of ASBO's.

The department uses several avenues for publicising their work including:-

- National Noise Day
- the website
- door to door leaflet drops in problem areas and
- articles in Borough Life.

Customer Care Service Standards

Community Protection department sends out customer feedback forms which show the performance for 2004-05 as follows:-

- 96% complainants contacted within 3 days (1,000 calls received each year)
- 92% complaints are resolved within 30 days
- 96% satisfaction with the courtesy and helpfulness of staff
- 91% satisfaction with the service overall.

These figures cover all types of complaints and service enquiries into the department and give a strong indication of how well the department handles all types of complaint or enquiry from the public.

However, despite these figures the department recognise there are two areas in which improvement can be made:-

- ensuring complainants are kept informed of the progress of the complaint, and
- how it promotes the service to the wider public

4.4 The Role of Greater Manchester Police service (GMP)

Graded Response System

The Select Committee heard details of the 'Graded Response' system the police use to match public demand for police services. The grades are split into five categories as follows:-

- **Grade 1** being the highest priority when there is an immediate threat to life, risk of serious injury, when a crime is being committed. Police will attend within 10 minutes of the call being taken.
- **Grade 2** – where the call doesn't justify an immediate response but does necessitate police attendance within the hour of the call being received.
- **Grade 3** – aims to respond in four hours of call being taken.
- **Grade 4** – intended to address the 'quality of life' type of incidents which are better dealt with by utilising locally-based options such as Community Beat officers, traffic Officers, Crime Reduction Advisors or representatives from partner agencies
- **Grade 5** – will be used when the call can be resolved successfully over the phone. For instance, reporting of crime, receiving of intelligence, referring to another agency or simply giving advice.

It was indicated that typical calls fall within the grade 3 priority.

However, the Select Committee believes this continues to be a source of complaint and concern for many people who contact the police. Improved response times by the police together with an improved understanding of the graded response system would help allay many of these concerns

Force Wide Incident Number

The use of FWIN (Force Wide Incident Numbers) was explained whereby people calling the police to check on progress should refer to this incident number (rather than wait to speak to a specific officer) to avoid having to repeat the details of their complaint or enquiry.

Feedback and communications

Concerns were also expressed at the lack of feedback and regular contact with members of the public (regarding their complaint). Evidence suggested inconsistency of approach by the police in different areas of the borough. The police accepted this as an area for improvement and currently work is being undertaken to address this concern. Improving responsiveness and customer service is a performance measure for GMP as contained in their 2005-2008 Strategic Plan.

Community Volunteer Scheme

Encouraging people to report NN/ASB was recognised as a real difficulty particularly, if threats of reprisal or intimidation had been made or perceived. The police representative recognised that further work was needed in this area and referred to the new Community Volunteer scheme planned for Wigan and other parts of the Greater Manchester Police region.

This scheme, planned for introduction in 2006, is intended to increase community reassurance by drawing on the skills and experience of local volunteers to establish closer links with the community.

Duties will include updating victims of crime on the progress of cases, and crime prevention measures such as leafleting and property marking.

Collaborative working

The Select Committee recognised that the police service were working hard with all their partners in tackling NN/ASB.

An example of collaborative working with Wigan and Leigh Housing to address NN/ASB was given. This was in connection with lower levels of NN/ASB and the sharing of information using the ASB1 Form. The information provided by GMP relating to the number and frequency of police visits to a property can give Housing Managers with sufficient evidence to revoke a tenancy.

Communications and Single Non-emergency Number (SNEN)

The Committee were concerned the difficulties they faced in contacting the police could only be worse for the general public including knowing when an issue was a police matter or a council matter. They suggested one telephone number, 'a one stop shop', for the public to ring and a simplified way for key people, including councillors, to contact the police to report criminal information in a timely manner.

There is currently a national single non-emergency number (SNEN) programme under way. The programme is intended to provide the public with a 3-digit number separate from the 999 system. It is intended to improve public access to the service and help police and their local authority partners achieve a more co-ordinated response. It is intended that the service will cover:

- Vandalism/graffiti
- Noisy neighbours
- Intimidation and harassment
- Abandoned vehicles
- Rubbish and litter
- People being drunk or rowdy in public
- Drug dealing
- Street lighting

The target date for a total national programme is May 2008. However, it is not clear when GMP and the AGMA authorities are to be involved in the programme but it there will need to be a great deal of consultation and agreement between GMP and the 10 districts involved.

Local Police Presence

In response to the on-going closure of local police stations they are planning to place police officers in specific SOA's (Super Output Areas). This will be linked closely with the township forum and the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator to ensure local specific issues are identified and acted upon.

However, they are working with limited resources and recognise they will need to work more closely with their partner agencies to maximise the synergy of this collaborative working. The newly created post of Reassurance Co-ordinator in the Community Protection Department will also have responsibility for developing and further improving joint working of all partner agencies.

Police Community Support Officers

The Select Committee voiced concerns at public perceptions of Police Community Support Officers. It was felt that many people failed to recognise the work and contribution being made by the Community Safety Officers in tackling NN/ASB issues on the streets. There is a need to dispel the myth that CSO's are not 'real' police officers so therefore have no real power or impact.

4.5 Local Area Agreement (LAA)

The Local Area Agreement Wigan has recently agreed with the ODPM sets out a number of high level outcomes linked to the Council's Community Plan goals. Although some of the work associated with the LAA has no direct bearing on this review, much of the work dealing with Safer and Stronger Communities should make an impact. This is described below.

The Council's vision for Safer and Stronger Communities states that:-

'The borough's residents will know that rates of crime, disorder and drugs misuse have been reduced substantially. They will know why and how this has been achieved and will live more secure and healthy lives as a result.'

The high-level outcome measure for safer and stronger communities is to reduce total crime (as defined by the British Crime Survey) by 22% by March 2008. This is supported by four sub-measures focusing on:-

- reducing total recorded crime;
- reducing burglary;
- **reducing public perception of NN/ASB; and**
- increasing the number of planned discharges from structured drug treatment

Six monthly strategic assessments will be used to determine priorities for intervention and to inform and co-ordinate Community Safety Partnership resources. This strategic assessment approach will help focus activity on a range of positive interventions including:-

- targeting hotspots
- targeting prolific offenders, and
- use of 'Contact Cards'

These actions will be complimented and supported by a proactive media campaign that reinforces the public's actual experience are far more encouraging and positive than the negative public perceptions of NN/ASB.

Reassurance Co-ordinator

To help take some of these initiatives forward a new post of Reassurance Co-ordinator has recently been recruited to the Community Protection Department.

The key purpose of the role will be to:-

- **To co-ordinate the Community Safety Partnership's efforts to reduce the public perception gap on crime, drugs and disorder (including anti-social behaviour), and**
- **Increase the public's confidence in the police and partnership agencies**

In particular the role will look to improve communications between those making a complaint of NN/ASB and the different agencies involved tackling these problems. This will focus on providing effective feedback and regular progress reports on actions taken in respect of their complaint.

The Reassurance Co-ordinator will also be looking to promote and introduce a victim-focused service aimed at providing positive support, guidance and reassurance to those people who have been subjected to NN/ASB. It will also look to give greater assurance and support to witnesses and potential witnesses of NN/ASB incidents. This will work in conjunction with the new community volunteer scheme currently being piloted by GMP in Wigan and North Manchester.

4.6 Consultation with members of the public

In seeking to establish how well the Council deals with NN/ASB the Select Committee met with a number of people who had recently submitted a complaint of NN/ASB. The group was selected at random from the complaints systems of Wigan and Leigh Housing and the Consumer Protection Department. They took part in a lively structured discussion to tell the Select Committee how well we dealt with their complaint.

Discussion and areas raised, ranged from:-

- Staff were helpful and polite
 - A Council officer visited me in my home as I wasn't very well
 - It is easy if you have access to the internet
 - Group agreed that overall we are supportive, sympathetic, knowledgeable and helpful
-
- Don't get acknowledgements to say complaint has been received
 - Not possible to report a complaint after 5.00pm or during week-ends as the noise Helpline is not open
 - Intimidation is a problem when reporting a complaint
 - Council Officers are also intimidated and so are not taking action

The discussion repeatedly came round to how the group felt about the way the police manage NN/ASB complaints. Their comments are summarised below:

- A general feeling that the Council just passes complaints on to the police who then just pass them to the Council so nothing gets done.
- The police do not take some complaints seriously.
- People have come to expect flippant comments from police officers.
- Get no response from the police.
- When police do respond it's 6-8 hours later to check if there is still a problem and then they offer to come the next day
- Group agreed that law-abiding people have fewer rights than the unlawful. Unable to make a citizens arrest. Feel powerless.

At the close of the meeting most people spoke in positive terms of the event. The Select Committee believe there may be some benefits in adopting this approach on a more regular basis.

5 What We Found

In response to the key areas identified in the terms of reference the review found:

1 To understand who is affected by NN/ASB

NN/ASB occurs throughout the borough and is concentrated in a number of Super Output Areas. A significant proportion of these are within many of the Council's housing estates. Although, many private housing estates also suffer incidents of NN/ASB.

2 To identify the scale and types of NN/ASB and whether these are increasing or decreasing, and

3 To identify the geographical spread of any such nuisance and at the same time highlight identified 'hot-spots'

The existing systems for recording NN/ASB are unable to provide the type of analysis as outlined above at this present time. A new IT system due to be introduced into Community Protection department will be able to accommodate this type of analysis.

However, a new IT system is currently being developed for Community Protection department which will allow for far more detailed analysis of NN/ASB. The new system expected to be introduced during the later part of 2006.

4 What reporting and feedback channels currently exist and the effectiveness of these channels

W&LH have a Tenancy Relations team concentrating on NN/ASB issues.

A dedicated Anti-Social Behaviour website provides comprehensive guidance and advice to tenants affected in any way by such actions. Incidents can be reported direct via this website.

A nuisance hotline is available, although this only provides for reporting incidents via an ansaphone service.

For those without access to the Internet, this guidance and advice is readily available from area housing offices.

Tenants reporting an incident of NN/ASB can expect a response within 24 hours or for urgent cases within 2 hours, irrespective of how the report is received.

A range of solutions and support options to tackle incidents of NN/ASB are used as appropriate. These include, provision of security cameras, security door and window locks and mobile phones. And in extreme cases, they may

move a family to new location.

Community Protection Department deal with reports of NN/ASN from either the Environmental Health or Anti-social Behaviour Unit. They provide contact telephone numbers and e-mail addresses on the Council's website. They are in the process of developing a dedicated website but a lack of IT resources has delayed this work. There are no specific guidance or advisory booklets readily available to members of the public.

Recently, a major leaflet campaign explaining what constituted ASB and how people could tackle the problem was sent out to close on 80,000 households. This information contained a list of useful telephone numbers for all the major agencies involved.

5 What is done to encourage people to report nuisance, including the accessibility and promotion to the general public

W&LH have actively promoted their new Anti-Social Behaviour website. This is an interactive facility allowing tenants easy and immediate opportunity to report NN/ASB incidents.

In addition they now have available a 46-page booklet titled **Living with anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisance**. Much of this is aimed at giving tenants reassurance that W&LH will treat seriously any reports of NN/ASB. It explains what actions are available, including ASBO's, legal proceedings and possession orders.

When appropriate they publicise to the community successful actions against NN/ASB. They make this publicity available by:

- Use of the website
- Leaflet drops in relevant areas
- Press releases in the national and local press
- Text messages to tenants with mobile phones

A recent leaflet campaign has been used to encourage people to report NN/ASB. This has concentrated on encouraging people to report incidents and work with W&LH to tackle the problem. This message is also promoted on the website.

The involvement of tenant representatives in developing much of this work enhances tenant confidence in the system.

However, W&LH recognise that more still needs to be done in this area. It plans to raise the awareness of the Tenancy Relations Team and the work it does dealing with neighbour nuisance and anti-social behaviour.

6 The effectiveness of the partnership working

All three agencies involved have provided evidence showing how they work together. It is clear they all recognise the benefit of sharing information to tackle incidents of NN/ASB.

Examples of this included the sharing of information on the ASB1 Form. The provision of such information from GMP provides W&LH with solid evidence to pursue legal action against persistent offenders.

The 10 Township Community Safety Groups (TCSG) at which all key partners attend are proving beneficial to tackling local community concerns.

Community Protection Department collects and collates all information recorded on the Contact Cards issued by GMP. This information is now being made available electronically to GMP and W&LH.

6 Conclusions

The Select committee heard from a number of witnesses and has concluded that: -

1. There is evidence of the key partners working in a collaborative manner. Examples of this include the ASB1 Form, the Township Community Safety Groups and the recently introduced protocol for sharing of Contact Card information.
2. Sound processes are in place to receive and respond to the majority of NN/ASB complaints. Customer feedback on complaint handling is high in both W&LH and Community Protection department. Both organisations recognised however, that further improvements in this area need to be made.
3. A recent initiative on the Trees estate involving a door-to-door leaflet drop informing residents of a successful eviction of a drug dealer was welcomed by many on the estate. The Select committee believe the use of this localised news reporting should be explored further as an effective means of reassuring tenants. At the same time it reinforces the message that NN/ASB will not be tolerated and if necessary serious action taken.
4. Anecdotal evidence suggests GMP are less effective at responding to complaints of NN/ASB. They recognise this as a priority for improvement. The GMP Service Plan for 2005-08 has a number of priorities for working with its communities. Amongst these is target for improving responsiveness and customer service.
5. Communications with the general public about NN/ASB is recognised by all parties as less than ideal. This is particularly acute for those extreme cases of NN/ASB in which victims have genuine fear of reprisals, if they pursue a formal complaint.
6. Both W&LH and Community Protection department offer a range of services to help and support members of the public who are subject to NN/ASB. Examples of these include, CCTV cameras, provision of window and door security locks, fire blankets.
7. W&LH have a new NN/ASB website, which provides a valuable resource for tenants. It provides comprehensive a range of guidance and support options.
8. Community Protection department are currently looking at a similar facility but have experienced delays due to lack of IT resources.
9. Both departments have a range of options available to deal with perpetrators of NN/ASB. Evidence shows that they utilise this full range as appropriate. These options include, Good Behaviour Agreements,

ASBO's, prosecution, seizure of equipment, notice of possession/eviction orders

10. There remains the problem that members of the public perceive the incidence of NN/ASB as increasing. This at a time when in reality the overall level in Wigan is reducing. The work of the new Partnership Reassurance Co-ordinator is starting to address many of the issues relating to the public perception of NN/ASB.
11. W&LH recognised that many tenants had lost faith in the use of Diary Sheets as a means of tackling NN/ASB. Consequently, the completion of Diary Sheets by tenants is now undertaken in a more focused manner. Tenancy Relation staff closely monitors the issue, recording of incidents and collection of completed sheets on a regular basis. The Select Committee, however, recognise that Diary Sheets remain a useful source of evidence but need to be issued with care and only when clearly applicable.
12. In order to address the difficulties associated with difficult and problem tenants or applications, W&LH are currently exploring the use of Local Lettings Policies. However, these must be evidence based and retain the essential principles of transparency and choice.
13. Contact Cards are considered to be having a positive impact on reducing NN/ASB. It is believed sharing of this information will further improve this impact. Consequently, a new IT system (Flare) is now in place to allow W&LH and GMP greater access to Contact Card information. For Wigan & Leigh Housing such access will be restricted to information about their tenants and families.
14. The serving of a Notice of Possession Orders is a process which may lead to an eviction or termination of a tenancy. The process rightly contains a number of key stages with the final decision resting with the Director of Community Protection, acting on behalf of the Council.
15. For those cases involving a tenant of W&LH there has been a proposal to delegate this responsibility to the Chief Executive of W&LH. The benefit of this suggestion would be a streamlining of the process with a resultant reduction in overall process time.

7 Who was involved?

Membership of the Select Committee consisted of:

Cllr F Walker Chair
Cllr R Derricutt
Cllr I Franzen
Cllr J Lavelle
Cllr J Prescott
Cllr P Prescott
Cllr R Winkworth

Policy Officers Jim Taylor and Tracy Bennett supported the Committee.

The Select Committee met on 8 occasions and interviewed a range of interested parties as follows: -

Deputy Director Community Protection Department
Tenancy Relations Manager – Wigan & Leigh Housing
Group Housing Manager – Wigan & Leigh Housing
Representatives from the Greater Manchester Police

The Select Committee also met with a group of tenants who had recently submitted a complaint to the Council or W&LH, asking how well they considered the Council handled their complaint.

Acknowledgement

The Select Committee would like to thank all those who attended the meetings as witnesses together with those who provided information and other contributions to the review.