

Anti-Social Behaviour / Alcohol Free Zones –

Report of the Bromsgrove District Labour Group

Background

The Labour Group has been for sometime aware that there is growing concern regarding Anti-Social Behaviour and that our young people are being demonised by people's perception of anti-social behaviour.

The high level of anti-social behaviour in certain areas of the district plus with the ever increasing recreation facilities (£500,000 in four years) coming mainly from government agencies and the ever growing number of agencies and organisations working in this area, provide the impetus for the carrying out of this scrutiny exercise.

In addition, throughout the district alcohol free zones have been implemented but there is no data to support their success or failure. The Labour Group has supported AFZs and feel now a need to confirm their success or failure.

Terms of reference

To raise awareness and make recommendations

Identify:

- the investment in recreational facilities.
- Schools approach to anti-social behaviour and their links with other agencies.
- Police approach to anti-social behaviour and their links with other agencies/organisations.
- Crime reduction panels role.
- Bromsgrove District Council's role as the catalyst to bring organisations together.
- Sports development

A number of interviews took place with police officers throughout the district concentrating on the areas with the highest Anti-Social Behaviour incidents.

The questions for the police and youth officer were based on those in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 for the community safety officer and officer responsible for recreation and parks with some complementary questions where necessary.

Police Interview – Rubery Area

Police saw and acted upon Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) as a priority and identified the ages of those responsible as between 14yrs to 18. ASB was more prevalent with males than females.

The main reason given to the police for ASB was the lack of anything to do. It was also accepted that residents were more concerned about ASB than anything else.

Although the police are working hard in the area, Rubery still has one of the highest levels of ASB in the district and yet the lowest number of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO). Thus, there is evidence to demonstrate a possible correlation between high levels of ASB and low ASBO.

It was hard to determine the highest recorded form of ASB. This was due to the fact that ASB covers almost everything. Criminal activities can be included under the umbrella of ASB and reduce crime figures: ASB is recorded as incident not a crime.

Pastoral Care at the local high school seemed to be the closest the school came to being involved with the local community. There were no drop-in surgeries, although, the local police were

now at the final stage of implementing Multi Agency Support Team (MAST). There was evidence to show the majority of those responsible for ASB are local. However, the involvement with the local community is poor and supports the view what goes on outside the school is no business of the school.

However, discussions were now taking place with representatives from the local high school to involve the school more in the community in an attempt to enrich civic pride. Students at the school are to produce hanging baskets to hang outside the police station. In addition discussions initiated by the police to create a Youth Council were on going.

With regard to Alcohol Free Zones (AFZs) the police felt that although they have received a great deal of publicity they could be policed more effectively with the issuing of £50 Fixed Penalty Tickets. Community Safety Officers (CSO) are best placed to this as they are more active in the AFZs, but are not accredited to do so. To date no one has received a fixed penalty ticket.

However, Bromsgrove District Council's Community Safety Team have promised that by next year Neighbourhood Wardens will be accredited to issue Fixed Penalty Tickets. This is the practice both in Wychavon and Wyre Forest.

Police Interview – Bromsgrove South

ASB was a priority and those involved were between 13yrs and 17 years of age. As much as 75% of police time was spent dealing with incidents of ASB. The most reported incidents were criminal damage, the intimidation of other young people and of residents, referred to as ‘nuisance groups’. There were also ever increasing incidents of youths riding mini-motor bikes.

Residents saw ASB as a priority.

Close working relationships are in operation with the MARC, local schools, e.g. a Youth PACT taking place now at South Bromsgrove High School. In addition Bromsgrove District Housing Trust and school welfare officers take part in bi-monthly Inter-agency meetings. There is also a ‘Prevent to Deter’ programme tailored for ASB to get pupils ‘back on the rails’.

Most ASB was carried out by local youths and 80% of ASB incidents were carried out by males, but there was evidence to show there is an ever increasing trend towards females offending. Most ASB was the result of young people having

little else to do; the drinking of alcohol and just wanting to be destructive.

Strong support was given to the creation of Alcohol Free Zones which have been successful in the right areas. But it was felt that creating an AFZ where there is no real need could have a detrimental affect. They may criminalize people when the police already have powers to prevent drinking in public. In addition it could force people to drink elsewhere out of sight when it may be appropriate to know where they are drinking.

No one has been prosecuted for drinking in an AFZ.

Police Interview – Bromsgrove North

Anti-Social Behaviour is a priority and it is estimated that between 60% to 70% of police time was spent on ASB. The age of those responsible was between 14yrs to 18yrs. It was also seen as a priority by local residents.

Could not state the most reported incident of ASB, because they were unable to define concisely a criminal offence and distinguish it from ASB. This was left to the Crime Scrutiny Team at Kidderminster Divisional Head Quarters. It felt it would mainly be youths gathering inappropriately, perhaps in a threatening way.

Relationships with the local schools were felt to be very good and school visits were always welcomed. E.g. drop-in facilities at the local high school.

Most ASB was carried out by local people and was made up of 60% male and 40% female. There was no conclusive evidence whether ASB lead to the criminalising of individuals. It was felt there will always be a small minority that will always be involved in disruptive behaviour.

Reasons for ASB: nothing else to do; lack of organised events and the need for guidance from the home. Youths also felt safe in large numbers. However, to many the very sight of large groups was intimidating (perception). In addition as people become more affluent recorded incidents of ASB increase.

There were close working relationships with Bromsgrove Housing Trust and community wardens were doing their best organising events for young people. But it was felt Bromsgrove District Council sports development could do more. Also the crime reduction panel need to implement more diversionary activities.

The police were looking to see if the Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGA) spread throughout the district could be used for organised events as a means of reducing ASB.

In support of AFZs: it is a very handy tool to deal with problem areas. However, there was a serious lack of enforcement with not one fixed penalty ticket being issued. Youths would soon catch on that there was a lack of enforcement and ignore the AFZ's.

Interview - Community Safety Partnership Officer and Recreation and Parks Officer

The recording of ASB was mainly down to the perception of the receiver. Own data showed a reporting of 300 incidents a year. Most reported incidents were analysed at police head quarters then sent to Bromsgrove District Council.

A review at the moment was being carried regarding the reporting of ASB to remove operator error and distinguish between the natural behaviour of young people and incidents of ASB.

The top five recorded incidents were:

1. Nuisance: youths gathering playing ball games and risking of damage.
2. Vehicle nuisance: boy racers mini motorbikes.
3. Malicious comments to residents.
4. Neighbourhood nuisance: not being community friendly
5. Hoax emergency calls

The age group of those causing ASB were from 13 years of age and upwards. There is insufficient evidence at the moment to

actually substantiate this as it is subjective rather than evidence based.

ASB is a priority and two more sports development officers had now been engaged. However, the number of neighbourhood wardens had been depleted but shortly it should be back to three. Originally there were four.

Diversionary activities being organised: Rubery Football Project, Angling Project, Sports workers to deliver sessions on Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA) in Summer and re-launch of a Boxing Club.

Head teachers had now been invited to attend Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) meetings, but PFI schools were interested in profit making and showed a lack of interest in working with the community. Reps from the CDRP were also involved in the Inter-agency group and MAST.

The CDRP was working with head teachers to initiate diversionary plans to stop the congregating of youths. In addition support Section 30 orders where necessary.

Most ASB was caused by local people but it did not matter where they came from the important issue was prevention.

Stating it was not local people could well be an excuse to do nothing. Also, ASB was evenly split between males and females as in deed was the consumption of alcohol.

There was little evidence to show those who are involved with ASB go on to be criminals. However, there was a real threat that young people are being demonised by the elderly for what can only be described as natural behaviour of the young.

The Fear of Crime survey put ASB as 3 in the order of priority. It also showed that an aging population fears young people. Older people believe that they are surrounded by a job culture full of hoodies.

The explanation for this could well be due to the fact that young people are better educated and challenge rules more than they did in the past. However, such perceptions have been a major contributing factor for the increase in the recording of ASB.

The CDRP supported AFZs but accept they are not working as expected, mainly because they are resource intensive and thus should be part of a package not 'adhock' as they are at the moment. There is no enforcement although a report will be going to cabinet in September to train Neighbourhood Wardens to issue fixed penalty tickets.

Interview – Rubery Youth Officer

ASB is based on the norms and values of individuals. Some may find gays holding hands offensive while others see that as a sign of freedom of expression and recognition of peoples rights. It is very hard to state why there has been a rise in the recording of ASB as it is based on one's perception and fear.

Many young people are demonised for just expressing their rights but the overwhelming majority respects others. The youth centre runs seminars on how young people can avoid trouble and be streetwise. It also monitors people's behaviour and records their outcomes.

Residents clearly see ASB as a priority as indeed young people do. Young people are the main victims of ASB but this never comes over to the public. Young people have a fear of groups and fear being attacked when they go out.

ASB has meant young people having to sweep their skateboard park clear of glass before use and criminal damage experienced within the youth club.

Young people have a sense of justice and are more likely than any other age group to be mugged, intimidated or being taken advantage of if they have consumed alcohol.

Connections with the local high school are strong with involvement in pastoral care and regular meetings with teachers. There are strong links with the local police and there is police involvement with the youth centre.

There was concern that there were no organised events regarding the skateboard park and the MUGA. This was mainly down to a lack of resources.

There was support for AFZs as it is young people consuming alcohol who are a risk. Many young people through the consumption of alcohol become vulnerable to theft and sexual attacks.

Interview – Director ARTRIX Arts Centre, Bromsgrove

Was not aware of the level of ASB in the district or the most recorded incidents of ASB. Would not comment on whether ASB was a priority for the Centre.

Relationships with local schools was evident with workshops targeting under achievers running through the holidays.

Felt males were mainly involved in ASB but females were catching up. The public perceived groups of young people as threatening. Adolescents like to be different and their culture is to kick against society and this is often perceived as ASB.

ARTRIX works with other agencies such as the police, Pubwatch section of WCC and the extended schools network. There is pressure from the trustees to cover all age groups.

AFZ were seen as a good thing as young people drinking alcohol soon escalates into ASB. However, participation is required by the public to support it. Not aware of any convictions regarding AFZs

Conclusion

Residents accepted criminal activities as separate from ASB and are more concerned with ASB because it affects them directly mainly at their place of residence. Clear evidence that residents see ASB as a priority to be dealt with. This can be supported by the fact that on average 70% of police time was spent dealing with ASB.

There is a consensus that the age group responsible for ASB is from 13 upwards. Also, the main reason given for ASB is the lack of things to do.

The process used for recoding ASB is questionable as there seem to be no clear guidelines regarding what are ASB and what is not. Therefore, crime figures could be reduced by recording crime under the umbrella of ASB. A good example of this is Hoax Calls to the emergency services being recorded as ASB.

However, people's perception plays a role in defining what is natural behaviour for young people and that of ASB. There is reason to believe that affluence means people have a great deal more to lose and are apt to report ASB out of a fear of possible

criminal damage with the elderly in most fear of groups of young people and youth culture.

There does seem to be a lack of understanding regarding young people and ASB. Young people are the main victims of ASB and therefore regard being in large groups as a way of ensuring their safety.

There was little evidence to demonstrate that ASB turns people into criminals, indicating that those with a criminal bent are doing other things than engaging themselves in ASB.

The police in general were involved in local schools and community projects of one nature or another. The CPA and CDPD were also involved with schools, introducing various diversionary activities.

The ARTRIX which is subsidised by the local authority by £120,000 a year did not accept ASB as a priority and over the summer period had no diversionary activities in place for his clientele group.

The £500,000 invested in MUGA's/ Skateboard parks were not being used to their full potential. There were no organised

events even though they are well used and would attract the very clientele group associated with ASB.

There are more than eighteen AFZ throughout the District of Bromsgrove. They differ from short alleyways to the blanket cover of a whole village. There is also evidence of double standards with some recreation grounds singled out as being acceptable for the consumption of alcohol and being refused AFZ orders.

Alcohol Free Zones were welcomed by all those interviewed, but there was dissatisfaction over the lack of enforcement as no one had yet been prosecuted, as well as the ad hoc implementation.

Bromsgrove District Council the body responsible for the implementation of AFZs, had not thought it out clearly and is only now considering its officers to be accredited to enable them to issue Fixed Penalty Tickets.

Recommendations

1. All efforts should be made to stop the demonising of young people with schools working in partnership with local police and local councillors to develop projects that enrich civic pride in the local community.
2. The police to put in place a process that reassures the public that ASB is not being used to reduce crime figures and that Hoax Calls are no longer recorded as ASB but as a crime.
3. Bromsgrove District Council's sports development officers should put the MUGA's/ Skateboard to good use through organised events throughout the district.
4. As part of the service level agreement with Bromsgrove District Council the continuation of the £120,000 subsidy is dependant on the ARTRIX facing up to its responsibilities to develop programmes to reduce ASB.
5. A policy regarding Alcohol Free Zones should be agreed upon by the District Council that is fair and equitable and does not discriminate from one area of the district to another. Consultation should be with those involved at the

sharp end; local police local councillors and other directly interested parties. The Community Safety Team should not be consulted as it is not at the sharp end and not directly involved.

6. The District Council and the police agree to accredit both Neighbourhood Wardens and Community safety Officers to issue fixed penalty tickets to enforce Alcohol Free Zones.
7. Initiatives that reduce ASB such as those seen in certain schools should be shared amongst all interested parties – including local councillors.
8. That the District Council, County Council and Police set up immediately an Anti-Social Behaviour Team with an action plan containing targets to reduce ASB in the district.

Appendix 1

Anti-Social Behaviour & Alcohol Free Zones

Questions:

1. How much of police time is spent on Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) incidents?
2. The main age group of offenders
3. Do you see ASB as one of your priorities?
4. Which is the most reported form of ASB?
5. How do you work with schools to prevent ASB or how do schools work with you?
6. What are your relationships with schools regarding ASB?
7. Is most ASB carried out by local people?
8. Do you associate ASB more with males than females?
9. Is there any evidence that ASB is the pretext to further and worsening criminal action?
10. How do you rate ASB as a priority in the public eye (1 – 5)?
11. What do think the impetus is for ASB?
12. Do you work closely with any other agencies on the single issue of ASB?

13. How successful in your opinion have Alcohol Free Zones (AFZ) been?
14. Do you support AFZ?
15. How many people have been prosecuted for breaching AFZ?

Appendix 2

Anti-Social Behaviour & Alcohol Free Zones

Questions:

1. How do you describe ASB and record it?
2. The main age group of offenders?
3. Do you see ASB as one of your priorities?
4. Which is the most reported form of ASB?
5. How do you work with schools to prevent ASB or how do schools work with you?
6. Have you an action plan for areas of high ASB?
7. Is most ASB carried out by local people?
8. Do you associate ASB more with males than females?
9. Is there any evidence that ASB is the pretext to further and worsening criminal action?
10. How do you rate ASB as a priority in the public eye (1 – 5)?
11. What do think the impetus is for ASB?
12. Do you work closely with any other agencies on the single issue of ASB?
13. How successful in your opinion have Alcohol Free Zones (AFZ) been?

14. Do you support AFZ?
15. How many people to your knowledge have been prosecuted for breaching AFZ?