



National Audit Office

**THE HOME OFFICE**  
**Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 Anti-social behaviour encompasses a broad range of behaviours including nuisance behaviour, intimidation and vandalism.<sup>1</sup> On average 17 per cent of the population perceive high levels of anti-social behaviour in their area with the young and the less well off being disproportionately affected.<sup>2</sup> The cost to government agencies of responding to reports of anti-social behaviour in England and Wales is approximately £3.4 billion per year and there are significant indirect and emotional costs as well. The Home Office's Anti-Social Behaviour Unit is a small policy unit which in

the period 2003-06 covered primarily by this report had an annual budget of around £25 million to drive forward local action as set out in the Together anti-social behaviour action plan. In September 2005 the Government announced the creation of the Respect Task Force to take forward the anti-social behaviour agenda in conjunction with the Unit and subsequently, in January 2006, published the Respect Action Plan.<sup>3</sup> The Government is currently considering further legislation to address anti-social behaviour and take forward the Respect Agenda.

1 These behaviours are described more fully in paragraph 1.2 and Figure 2.  
2 Home Office, *British Crime Survey 2005-06*.  
3 The work of the Respect Task Force is not examined within this report.

2 This report examines the work of the Home Office's Anti-Social Behaviour Unit set up in 2003 and measures introduced by the Home Office since 1997 to enable the police, local authorities and others to tackle anti-social behaviour and considers the progress made. Our principal methods are set out in **Figure 1 overleaf** and a more detailed methodology is set out in Appendix 1.

3 We used our sample of cases to determine the apparent impact of the intervention applied in each case in terms of whether there was evidence of further anti-social behaviour within the period covered by the case file review, and if so, after how long, and what further intervention then occurred. In practice, it is possible that other factors unrelated to the intervention, such as changes in family circumstances for example, may have contributed partly or wholly to changes in behaviour. We are not therefore able to draw conclusions as to whether other forms of intervention or no intervention would have achieved the same or better outcome. Nevertheless, our case file review, together with discussions with Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinators and perpetrators, suggests interventions can be a contributory factor in deterring further anti-social behaviour, particularly if other support is also provided.

## Overall conclusion

4 The majority of people in our sample who received an anti-social behaviour intervention did not re-engage in anti-social behaviour, bringing some respite to the community. There was, however, a hard core of perpetrators for whom interventions had limited impact. The absence of formal evaluation by the Home Office of the success of different interventions and of the impact of providing support services in conjunction with interventions prevents local areas targeting interventions in the most efficient way to achieve the best outcome for the least cost. International research<sup>4</sup> suggests preventive programmes, including education, counselling and training are cost effective methods of addressing anti-social behaviour and the Home Office is addressing this issue through the Respect Action Plan which was outside the scope of this report.

5 Our key findings were as follows:

a The Anti-Social Behaviour Unit has successfully supported local areas through funding 373 Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinators to co-ordinate local strategy, promoting the use of new tools and powers



and providing training to practitioners. Whilst 21 per cent of the population perceived high levels of anti-social behaviour in 2002-03 this figure had shown a statistically significant decrease to 17 per cent by 2005-06. Perceptions vary significantly by area, however, with 29 per cent of people in London perceiving anti social behaviour as a problem compared to seven per cent in Lincolnshire and Essex<sup>5</sup>.

- b Based on our case review sample, many individuals are responsible for relatively minor incidents of anti-social behaviour and quickly desist from such behaviour. Some 65 per cent of our sample received only one intervention. About 46 per cent of our cases were aged under 18 and 54 per cent were over 18.
- c A small core of people, however, repeatedly engages in anti-social behaviour. Around 20 per cent of our sample received 55 per cent of all interventions issued in the period covered by the files in our review. This group also had an average of 50 criminal convictions in comparison to 24 convictions for those in our total sample with convictions.
- d There is variation in the use of different interventions which primarily reflects the severity of the intervention and the behaviour which it is intended to address<sup>6</sup>, with Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinators and others typically increasing the severity of interventions if the behaviour continues. However, our area visits suggested that in some cases Co-ordinators and others were more likely to use interventions which related to their background or local preference rather than there being a clear relationship to the behaviour exhibited.

4 Rubin et al, *Interventions to reduce anti-social behaviour and crime*, Rand Europe for the National Audit Office, September 2006.

5 Home Office, *British Crime Survey 2005-06*.

6 Inconsistencies in the data provided to the Home Office may also account for some of the variation.

**1** Our sources of evidence in carrying out this examination

**Method**

- Review of 893 case files in 6 local areas
- Structured interviews with Anti-social Behaviour Coordinators in 12 local areas
- Costing seminars in 12 local areas
- Focus groups with members of the public in 6 local areas<sup>2</sup>
- Semi-structured interviews with 20 individuals who have received anti-social behaviour interventions
- Literature review
- Expert opinion through a Reference Panel

**Purpose**

- To gather primary data on the use of anti-social behaviour interventions and the individuals who receive them.<sup>1</sup> To gather the evidence to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. We did not extrapolate to the national population on the basis of this sample.
- To establish the means through which local anti-social behaviour strategies are devised and delivered and hear about Co-ordinators' experience of working with the Home Office. Furthermore to identify key barriers and enablers in using the different interventions.
- To gather evidence on the multi-agency processes for delivering six anti-social behaviour interventions and to estimate the associated costs in terms of staff time.
- To assess the extent to which there are shared local priorities for tackling anti-social behaviour and to gauge public awareness and support for the strategy for tackling anti-social behaviour locally.
- To assess the perceptions of interventions from those receiving them and identify gaps in provision and support from the perspective of those engaging in anti-social behaviour.
- To assess the available evidence on the effectiveness of preventive schemes and cost savings resulting from diverting a potential perpetrator from a life of anti-social behaviour or crime.
- To provide expert advice throughout the study including a review of the methodology.

Source: National Audit Office

**NOTES**

- 1 The report does not attempt to consider whether alternative interventions should have been used in individual circumstances. It was not possible to carry out time series analysis looking at incidents of anti-social behaviour before and after an intervention because complete data was not available on file.
- 2 Our focus groups were composed of a range of individuals in each area designed to provide a range of experiences across all areas. The individuals were selected through quota sampling. For further details please see Appendix 1: Methodology.

**e** Acceptable Behaviour Contracts are the most frequently used intervention for which data is available.<sup>7</sup> 65 per cent of the people in our sample who received an Acceptable Behaviour Contract did not re-engage in anti-social behaviour. However Contracts were less effective with people aged under 18 where just over 60 per cent of our cases displayed further anti-social behaviour. This outcome could be due to a failure to engage the young person sufficiently in forming a contract and to support them, for example in disengaging from the society of certain of their peers.

**f** 63 per cent of the people in our sample who received a warning letter desisted from anti-social behaviour. The 37 per cent who did not respond positively to the intervention, however, re-engaged in anti-social behaviour much more quickly than those who had re-engaged in anti-social behaviour after an Acceptable Behaviour Contract or an Anti-Social Behaviour Order. Warning letters had most effect with young people with around 62 per cent of under 18 year olds receiving no further interventions. Warning letters are also the cheapest intervention costing approximately £66 compared to £230 for an Acceptable Behaviour Contract and £3,100 for an Anti-Social Behaviour Order.<sup>8, 9</sup>

7 Refer to Figure 9 for more detail.

8 Based on seminars in 12 local areas involving practitioners from a range of agencies including the police and local authorities. The cost does not include the cost of other support services which may be provided in conjunction with the intervention e.g. youth projects or drug rehabilitation schemes, nor does it include the cost of policing the intervention. Court costs are included but legal aid costs are not. The number of hearings required for the legal interventions will have a significant impact on the cost of the intervention. Stand alone Anti-Social Behaviour Orders are likely to be more costly than Orders on Conviction which are secured at the same time as the hearing for a criminal offence.

9 The outcomes for the three interventions are not directly comparable since different interventions are used in different circumstances. Warning letters are generally used for relatively minor acts of anti-social behaviour and are unlikely to be effective for more serious incidents.

- g** Just under a quarter of our sample had received an Anti-Social Behaviour Order of whom 40 per cent had received an earlier intervention and 80 per cent had criminal convictions. Thirty eight per cent of the recipients were under 18 and 85 per cent were male. Of all those in our sample who re-engaged in anti-social behaviour individuals who had received Anti-Social Behaviour Orders took longer to re-engage than either those who received warning letters or Acceptable Behaviour Contracts.
- h** Just over half of our sample cases breached their Anti-Social Behaviour Order, with a third of this group doing so on five or more occasions.<sup>10</sup> However, some of the breaches could relate to breaking one or more of the prohibitions of the Order, for example entering a prohibited area, rather than committing further anti-social behaviour. Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinators we spoke with suggested that a lack of capacity and experience of using anti-social behaviour legislation within local government legal services departments meant breaches were not always dealt with in a timely manner, frustrating the local community. The unwillingness of witnesses to give oral evidence at hearings for fear of reprisals was also considered a factor.

- Encourage all agencies administering interventions to provide targeted support to increase individuals' chances of meeting the conditions of the intervention, preventing further anti-social behaviour and potentially costs in the longer term.
- Make training available, through the Academies programme, to organisations which carry out anti-social behaviour interventions but have limited experience of dealing with young people and people with complex needs. This should enable organisations to engage constructively with such people about how they can meet the conditions of the intervention.
- Work with the Respect Task Force as the Government implements the Respect Action Plan, to undertake formal evaluation of the different schemes to build up an evidence base on the cost and effectiveness of different interventions.

To encourage greater working and information sharing across local areas the Home Office should:

- Enable local areas to benchmark their effectiveness against others (for example, by providing information to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships on others with similar characteristics).

## Recommendations

To encourage the most effective use of interventions the Home Office should:

- Encourage local areas to improve their case management systems sufficiently to collect comprehensive and comparable case information including information on age, gender, date of birth and ethnicity. This will enable local areas to monitor the effectiveness of the interventions they use and the Home Office to build up a greater understanding of the effectiveness of different interventions in different situations and with different people.

To encourage local communities to feel more confident in their ability to address anti-social behaviour in their area the Home Office should:

- Develop a strategy to support local areas to communicate more creatively to their local communities the efforts they are making to tackle anti-social behaviour, to reach all groups, and to provide feedback on actions taken to the victims and witnesses of anti-social behaviour.
- Encourage local areas to provide a consistent level of support to victims and witnesses of anti-social behaviour in all areas of the country.

<sup>10</sup> The data relating to warning letters and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts comes from our own case review, but data on breach of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders comes from matching our sample against the Police National Computer which contains information on everybody who has received a criminal conviction, including the breach of an Anti-Social Behaviour Order. There is however sometimes a time lag for court records containing information about convictions to be updated on to the Police National Computer. See Appendix 1, Paragraph 1.5 for a more detailed explanation of how the proportion engaging in anti-social behaviour was calculated.