

West Dunbartonshire Scrutiny Panel Report to the Housing Management Team March 2015

Scrutiny Exercise

Anti-social behaviour: Charter Indicator 19

The percentage of anti-social behaviour cases resolved within locally agreed targets
(WDC locally agreed target is 12 weeks)

1. Background

Established in summer 2014, the West Dunbartonshire Scrutiny Panel acts as a critical friend by taking an independent and objective view of West Dunbartonshire Council's housing service. The Panel forms an integral part of the performance management framework through effective links with the Housing Management Team and the formal tenant participation structure and contributes to improving housing services.

In May 2014 the Council submitted its first Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) reporting on 2013/14 performance against the Scottish Social Housing Charter outcomes to the Scottish Housing Regulator. In relation to Charter Indicator 19, the percentage of anti-social behaviour cases resolved within locally agreed targets reported by West Dunbartonshire Council was low at **35.56%**. The Scottish average figure for local authorities was 81%; West Dunbartonshire ranked bottom of all local authorities.

The West Dunbartonshire Scrutiny Panel chose the Council's anti-social behaviour service as its first scrutiny exercise based on this low return. The exercise involved examining key information, meeting with senior staff responsible for managing the service and conducting a customer survey. (*Key stages of the scrutiny exercise – appendix three*)

2. Key issues

Changes introduced following the 2013/14 ARC return

The Council explained that the poor performance reported for 2013/14 in relation to this Charter Indicator was partly because all relevant information had not previously been collected and recorded properly. The Panel subsequently requested a list of practices and processes which the Council had introduced since it submitted the 2013/14 ARC return and evidence that this had made a positive impact.

Some of the changes include creating a central point for monitoring all ASB cases, briefings with all staff and a new 9 and 11 week monitoring system (*See appendix one for a comprehensive list of changes*). Following the changes, the Council's performance in the first 6 months of 2014/15 has increased to 62.8% of cases resolved within the locally agreed timescale.

The panel are satisfied that the changes brought in to record and monitor against the Charter Outcome 19 has led to some improvement.

However, the Panel were also interested in the customer's experience of the service and strongly feel that whilst the timescale for closing cases is important and should be recorded and reported under the ARC, that recording and analysis of **case outcome** is equally significant.

Customer Survey

The Panel asked that a small independent survey be carried out to obtain a snap-shot of the customer experience of the anti-social behaviour service.

The Panel agreed a set of questions aimed at testing customer service and information, how anti-social behaviour cases are closed and customer satisfaction with the outcome. In order to keep customer details confidential the survey was carried out by Tenant Participation Officer. The anti-social behaviour team selected 30 contacts from across Category A, B and C listed cases.

The survey showed that customer service, information and knowledge about how their cases are being dealt with was better for customers who had experienced Category A and B anti-social behaviour, i.e. those cases managed by the Anti-Social Behaviour team. Category C customers (whose case is managed by Estates) were much less enthusiastic about the service received, standard of information and awareness of what was happening in their case.

The Panel acknowledges the Council's awareness of this issue and its subsequent decision to ensure that, as of 1st April 2015, the ASB Service will be the sole service dealing with all aspects of ASB thus conforming to its procedures. The Panel agreed that this will ensure a consistency in approach, refined reporting, one point of contact and clarity for customers. The Panel also acknowledges other service changes introduced:

- *Customers will have the option of a home or amicable location visit by representatives of the ASB Services within 24 hours of contact with us.*
- *Customers committed to work during daytime hours will be offered a night visit by our out of hours staff, this ensures we get to all our customers when they are available to discuss their complaint with us.*

- *This new measure will also see a senior officer from the ASB Service prioritising complaint/case action on a daily basis, the ASB management team will meet every morning to discuss all new complaints and from this point the case will be passed to the respective team to action with timely response.*

The survey also showed that customers whose case didn't involve legal remedies were not clear about why their case was closed and about the actual outcome. The Panel strongly believes that developing, recording and sharing case outcomes is reflective of good practice and together with other information will allow the Council to better evaluate the impact of the service.

There is no evidence that the Council is either recording (database template) or passing on to customers (template letters and survey) the outcome of anti-social behaviour cases.

Recommendation

The Panel would like to recommend that within each database record there is a separate section which details the case outcome (examples* provided by Service Development Officer):

- All appropriate measures taken, ASB ceased and no longer a cause for concern*
- All appropriate measures taken, ASB not completely ceased*
- No power to resolve and a full explanation given*

The panel would like to further recommend that each database record also records whether or not the outcome (not just the measures taken where appropriate) of the case is shared with the customer via letter.

Ensuring that all customers are aware of the 12 week timescale.

The Panel notes that the Council will inform customers at the start and at pre-closure of any investigation that there exists a locally agreed target of attempting to resolve all cases within a locally agreed target of 12 weeks.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that within each database record the date the case is closed and whether or not the case was closed within the 12 week timescale is shown.

The panel notes from the survey that a range of methods were used to inform customers that their case had been closed. The Panel asked about the Council's procedure to close cases, and notes the Council's intensive 4 week monitoring period (after all appropriate measures have been taken) before standard pre-closure letters are sent.

It is the Panel's view that the Council's pre-closure letter and closure letter lack customer focus and may discourage customers still experiencing anti-social behaviour from contacting the service. Whilst the Panel accept that the letter is an official record of intention to close/case closure the language used is cold and doesn't reflect the supportive and positive nature of the service which comes across in other areas.

Neither letter tells customers why the Council intends to/will close their case, i.e. explain to the customer about the Council's procedure to close their case if no further anti-social behaviour is experienced within the four week monitoring period.

It is the Panel's view that the 7 day notice period given to customers in the pre-closure letter isn't adequate.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that the Council reviews both pre-closure and closure letters with a view to making them customer focused. That reasons for intention to close are given in the pre-closure letter and that the Council considers sending the pre-closure letter at the start of the four week monitoring period.

The Panel would also like to recommend that the Council tell customers why their case has been closed in the closure letter along with the 'case outcome'. That from the 1st April the closure letter reflects the contact details of the Anti-Social Behaviour Service and not the contact details of the Housing Officer, Area Housing Office or One Stop Shop. The closure letter could also be used by the Council to promote exit or customer surveys, advising customers that the Council may contact them for their views and highlighting the importance this has in relation to improving the service.

Finally the Panel would recommend that the back of the letter is used to promote all services provided by ASIST.

Repeat cases

The Council has advised that the ARC database is in its infancy and that new cases are manually checked using search criteria for any repeat offenders.

Recommendation

As the database develops that Panel would like to recommend that it is used to identify repeat cases of anti-social behaviour reporting by victims. The Council should gather information about the number of cases closed which are subsequently re-opened.

The Panel notes the Council's decision to incorporate the Panel customer survey questions in future exit surveys.

3. Further Panel Comments

The Council has advised that ASB cases are deemed 'resolved' after the four week period has lapsed without further complaint. The Panel accepts that customers' expectations may include specific actions/outcomes for customers to deem their ASB case as 'resolved'. The Panel's view is that cases should be termed closed and that the Council should avoid using resolved as it infers that ASB has ceased and this is not the case for all closed cases.

The Panel notes the reported performance figure in January 2015 of 96.3% cases being resolved within target time and that a clear increase in closed cases against the local target is likely in the 2015 ARC return. In addition to the changes already introduced by the Council, the Panel believe that their recommendations would allow the Council to demonstrate further improvement and good practice.

The Panel would like to thank senior staff responsible for managing the Anti-Social Behaviour Service for their positive approach to the work of the Panel which contributed to a positive first scrutiny exercise. The Scrutiny Panel submits its recommendations to the Housing Management Team in line with the Panel's Terms of Reference and looks forward to a written response advising whether these recommendations will be adopted and expected timescales for implementation.

Appendix One

Key changes introduced by the Council following the first ARC submission:

Before the Council reported on the ARC, the Anti-Social Investigation and Support team (ASIST) fully focused on sustainable outcomes for all Category A and B cases of serious Anti-Social Behaviour **without any time restraint**. The focus on resolving cases with sustainable outcomes has not changed, however changes have been made to the way the Council monitors, collates and evidences resolved cases in line with the indicator and our locally agreed 12 week timescale.

In response to our low ARC performance return, and to ensure that we accurately count and manage all cases we carried out the following changes:

- visited Renfrewshire Council and Local Housing Associations to look at how they were responding to the ARC and to identify good practice;
- established a staff working group looking at robust 'appropriate measures' for WDC, collation of all records, and performance monitoring;
- proposed changes in relation to the role Housing Officers play dealing with anti-social behaviour (previously dealt with separately as neighbour complaints), whilst acknowledging that Estates Services continue to have role in determining the anti-social behaviour outcome;
- briefings to ASB Services and Estate Management staff to reinforce their awareness of the outcome and to ensure that we are all reporting and evidencing in the same way;
- a new monitoring database with a 9 and 11 week threat system, (case review meetings held at week 9 and 11 intervals where potentially no resolve within locally agreed target), monitoring system automatically shows threat and a meeting is arranged by the Team Leader and senior officers;
- a central point of monitoring for all ARC anti-social behaviour cases. All cases referred from Police Scotland, Estate Management, Mediation will be collated at one point. Estate Management feed their cases monthly to ensure accurate counting is achieved;
- all returns are evidenced based. This includes recording the 'appropriate measures' we have taken to resolve the cause of anti-social behaviour and may include copies of Anti-Social Behaviour Order, Notice of Proceedings, legal warnings, joint interview outcomes and eviction notices;
- a new 5 week monitoring period for all cases with the exception of Drugs cases because the duration of these cases are out with the landlord control;

- changed investigation procedure with ‘established offenders’ to include Joint interviews by Estate Management and ASIST. In both our Drugs (CAT A) and Noise Cases (CAT C) we will jointly interview the tenant for two purposes;
 - a. tenant will be advised of their current housing and Anti-Social Behaviour position and possible consequences if the anti-social behaviour does not stop
 - b. both services will work together at these key points to ensure that should legal action be taken at a later date, that the Council can evidence that the tenant has been kept fully up to date in respect to legislation
- record the following information:- case open and closed date, 12 week timescale and threat indicators, category of case, ‘Appropriate measure’ taken by us to tackle the cause of ASB – Hyperlink, Case Outcome, Legal intervention

WDC ARC criteria –changed the way in which we report cases as ‘resolved’ in line with government guidance, these are as follows:

- **Drugs CAT A** – When ASIST have been referred a case from Police Scotland that our tenant has been charged under the Misuse of Drugs Act for supply or intent to supply from their tenancy and after we have conducted our Joint Interview from ASIST/Estate Management, we will consider this case resolved. The landlord has no further power to deal with this case however ASIST will still pursue eviction on conviction however we have no control of this from report to Procurator Fiscal to trial.
- **Noise CAT C** – again after ASIST/Estate Management have interviewed the perpetrator and explained the breach of tenancy, possible consequences, and the 5 week monitoring period has lapsed without any further ASB, we will deem the case as resolved.
- **CAT A/B ASIST investigation**–If we secure an Interim/full ASBO before the 12 week period, or investigators have resolved the case without any legal remedies and ensuring our 5 week monitoring period has lapsed with no further complaints, we will consider the case closed.

Where cases run over the 12 week time period we will set out why this has happened and further measures we are taking to resolve the cause of ASB.

Appendix Two

Customer Survey key findings

Across categories A and B the majority of respondents talked about a positive experience in terms of customer service, information and general contact with the anti-social behaviour services team. The support received from the service was also commended. A less enthusiastic response is noted from Category C Cases (although it should be noted that Category C Cases are made up of a much smaller sample size).

- **given information about the different measures to deal with anti-social behaviour or told about any measures used to deal with your particular case:**

Responses from the majority of respondents across all categories are positive, those from Categories A and B were able to express more knowledge and understanding than those in Category C (again this is a smaller sample size).

- **asked about satisfaction with the service:**

Not all respondents could remember whether or not they were asked about satisfaction with the service. Respondents who said that they were asked were higher in Categories B & C.

- **telling you that your case was closed and the reason given:**

From across the survey responses it's appears unclear whether or not there is a fixed procedure for informing customers that their case is closed and for the reasons of closure. A number of different methods are being used and it appears that reasons for closure are most often given when the outcome has been an eviction or ASBO. Reasons for closure are less clear where a legal outcome hasn't occurred.

- **the outcome:**

The majority of respondents across all three categories indicated that they were satisfied with the outcome; however five respondents feel that their cases should still be live because anti-social behaviour is continuing.

The results of the survey were fed back to the Anti-Social Behaviour team and following changes have been noted by the Panel:

- As a result of service review and feedback from the Panel's survey, from 1st April 2015 all ASB cases from start to end will be the responsibility of the anti-social behaviour service ensuring one point of contact, refined ASB reporting and monitoring

The Panel hopes that this will ensure one point of contact (and therefore consistency in service across all ASB cases and consistency in approach, recoding and monitoring of the service

Appendix Three

Process

When	Actions
October 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Panel considered ARC information and agreed to carry out scrutiny activity on the Council's ASB services, submitted a list of questions to the Council and asked for copies of policies and procedures• Council provided a written response to Panel questions and folders containing procedures for all ASB teams along with awareness materials for Mediation, Public Reassurance, ASIST and Anti-Social Behaviour Officers
November 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Panel met with senior staff responsible for managing the anti-social behaviour service to discuss the service and reasons for low return• Panel requested a list of practices and processes which were introduced by the Council following the low performance submitted as part of the ARC. An up-to-date performance figure to establish whether or not the changes were having an impact was also requested.• Panel decided to carry out an independent customer survey to gauge customer experience of the anti-social behaviour service, Panel discussed and agreed key questions• Council provided information about new practices and review which had been undertaken since the ARC return, mid-year performance information was given and access to customer information was passed to Tenant Participation Staff for the survey
December 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Customer survey undertaken by TP
January 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Panel met and reviewed both the practices and processes introduced by the Council following the return on the ARC and the outcome of the customer experience survey• Panel submitted a range of queries to anti-social behaviour services senior staff
February 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Council response to queries shared with Panel• Panel met to discuss whole scrutiny exercise and agreed recommendations to be included in a report to the HMT

Appendix Four

Pre-Closure

Dear

I write to advise you that I intend to close our case file on your neighbour complaint.

If you are still experiencing problems, please contact me within seven days of receipt of this letter.

If you do not contact me within this period I will close our case file, and I will write to you again advising you of this.

Should you have any queries about the contents of this letter please contact me on the above telephone number.

Yours sincerely

Anti-Social Investigation & Support Team (ASIST)

Closure

Dear

I refer to my letter of (date) in which I advised you of my intention to close your case.

I write to advise you that your case is now closed, and that your Housing Officer has been made aware of this.

Should you have any cause to make a neighbour complaint in the future, please contact your Housing Officer at your local Area Housing Office/One Stop Shop in the first instance.

Should you have any queries about the contents of this letter, please contact me on the above telephone number.

Yours sincerely

Anti-Social Investigation & Support Team (ASIST)

Appendix Five

Investigation Template – shows the type of information recorded from start to resolve.

ASIST Officer	
Date case opened	
Referring Officer	

Perpetrator				
Name				
Address and Tenure				
DOB				
Telephone	Home		Work / Mobile	
Family Composition inc DOB				

Complainer				
Name				
Address and Tenure				
Telephone	Home		Work / Mobile	
Family Composition				
Nature of Case				

Special needs details

Agency Involvement	
Agency	Involvement

Summary of Action taken	
Date	

Summary