

More support for victims as Home Secretary demands tough local action against anti-social behaviour

As part of a drive to ensure that anti-social behaviour is dealt with more swiftly and effectively, the Home Secretary is improving the measures available to tackle the harmful impact of disorder and harassment that can make life a misery for local residents.

Today's package of measures builds on the Government's success in driving down anti-social behaviour.

The last 12 years has seen a raft of specially tailored new powers, which are proven to work, introduced to tackle anti-social behaviour in all its forms, including ASBOs, dispersal orders and, most recently, premises closure orders.

Latest figures from the British Crime Survey show there has been a fall in people's perception of ASB as a problem in their area over the last six years.

The measures introduced today include:

Better support for victims of ASB

- For the first time, all victims taking a stand in the Magistrates Courts against offenders whose anti-social behaviour is blighting communities will be offered help by Victim Support's Witness Service. This will include support in court proceedings, offering someone to accompany the witness when they give evidence and providing follow-up assistance when the court case is over;
- Almost £2.8 million over the next two years for a network of 85 victims and witness champions to be set up in priority areas across the country to stand alongside victims, delivering practical help to those taking a stand. This will include ensuring more people get support as victims of ASB, more joined up services where they already exist, training is offered to local antisocial behaviour coordinators and a single local referral point for all victim and witnesses.

Driving up prosecutions when ASBOs are breached

- A clear expectation that local areas (CDRPs - council, police and social landlords) ensure court action is taken against those who break the law by breaching ASBOs;
- A new assessment, with commitment from the Justice Secretary and the Attorney General, of how breaches are currently being dealt with; and
- New cross CJS guidance on dealing effectively with breaches

Home Secretary Alan Johnson said:

"I made it clear when I first became Home Secretary that dealing with anti-social behaviour is my top priority. The public rightly expects to live in neighbourhoods free from the corrosive effects of intimidation and harassment. I want to see both police and local authorities using the powers they have been given in a way that is effective and responds to peoples' needs at the right time.

"This may be tougher for some areas than for others, but communities will have to work together to show that antisocial behaviour is something that we tackle, rather than tolerate.

"It is vital no one ignores complaints of anti-social behaviour, as happened in the tragic case of Fiona Pilkington. Those on the receiving end of intimidation and abuse must not be made to feel like they are the ones causing a problem when they come forward.

"We have made good progress in tackling antisocial behaviour over the years by introducing wide ranging tools and powers that are proven to work. The public's overall perception of anti-social behaviour in their communities is also falling. But there is more work to be done; taking tough action against breaches of ASBOs through the courts is extremely important."

Minimum standards

Acknowledging good work in some areas, the Home Secretary also announced today that by March 2010 he expects to see all local areas delivering a minimum set of standards, including:

- reducing perceptions of ASB year on year
- regular updates for every community on what is being done to tackle antisocial behaviour – including an expectation to publicise ASBOs to the local community;
- Provide residents with a right of complaint to CDRPs/CSPs if effective action is not taken by local agencies through existing channels;
- support and help for victims of ASB;
- taking reports of ASB seriously by recording and investigating all cases and committing to keeping victims informed of action taken; and
- ensuring better links between neighbourhood policing and other local partners to deal swiftly with problems.

Across the country 62 areas where more than 25 per cent of the public feel ASB is a big problem will be given additional challenge and support to improve. Each area will be offered a visit from an ASB Delivery Expert in the next three months to help identify problems and, where needed, deploy the ASB Action Squad to help drive up performance.

Communities Secretary John Denham said:

"There are a troublesome minority creating misery for the hardworking majority.

"Local authorities, housing associations, local people and police working together have the powers to take action against those that are intent on blighting people's lives. The measures being announced today will reinforce this work and ensure that those that have been the victims of anti-social behaviour get the support they need.

"Where people are the victims they will now have a bigger say in bringing those people responsible to justice and holding those people responsible for tackling anti-social behaviour to account."

Gillian Guy, Chief Executive of Victim Support, said:

"This is good news for victims of anti-social behaviour. In our work with 1.5m victims each year, Victim Support sees first hand how damaging this can be. So we are pleased that the new anti-social behaviour champions will focus on improving co-ordination between agencies and make it easier for us to get on with practical help for victims in communities and courts."

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Victim and witness champions will be established in 85 priority areas backed by almost £2.8m of funding between now and 2011.
2. Local areas refer to Crime Disorder Reduction Partnership areas. For more information on CDRPs go to <http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/regions/regions00.htm>
3. Since 2003/4 there have been at least 89,579 uses of tools and powers designed to tackle anti-social behaviour and 14,974 ASBOs issued since April 1999. View full details of the use of ASBOs, including numbers breached, on the Crime Reduction website at <http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/asbos/asbos2.htm>
4. For more details on the ASB Action Website where members of the public can find details of their local areas performance in tackling ASB, and the contact details for their areas ASB Officer go to <http://www.asb.homeoffice.gov.uk/>
5. The 62 areas receiving direct challenge and support where 25 per cent or more of the public feel that ASB is a big problem in their area are:

Ashfield; Braking and Dagenham; Barnsley; Basildon; Bassetlaw; Beckley; Birmingham; Blackburn with Darwen; Bolsover; Bradford; Brent; Broxbourne; Burnley; Camden; Cannock Chase; Doncaster; Ealing; Enfield, Greenwich; Hackney; Hammersmith and Fulham; Haringey; Hillingdon; Hounslow; Islington; Knowsley; Lambeth; Liverpool; Luton; Manchester; Mansfield; Medway; Middlesbrough; Newham; North East Lincolnshire; Nottingham; Nuneaton and Bedworth; Oldham; Pendle; Portsmouth; Reading; Redbridge;

Rochdale; Rotherham; Salford; Sandwell; Slough; Southampton; Southwark; St Helens; Stoke-on-Trent; Swale; Tameside; Tamworth; Thanet; Thurrock; Tower Hamlets; Wakefield; Walsall; Waltham Forest; Wellingborough; and Wigan.

Additional 23 areas also receiving support from a Victims Champion include:

Blackpool; Bolton; Bristol; Caerphilly; Cardiff; Gateshead; Halton; Hull; Kirklees; Leicester; Lewisham; Newcastle; Newport; Northampton; Peterborough; Preston; Redcar and Cleveland; Sefton; Sheffield; South Tyneside; Sunderland; Swansea; and Wolverhampton.

6. For further details on people's perception of ASB please go to www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs08/hosb1508.pdf (Acrobat PDF file)
7. We have introduced a number of robust tools and powers over the last 12 years which are proven to work. An NAO Report from 2006 shows 65 per cent of perpetrators immediately stop their problem behaviour after the first intervention, 86 per cent after the second time and 93 per cent after the third.
8. For further information please contact David Langton in the Home Office Press Office on 020 7035 3835 or david.langton@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

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