

## **Early and informal interventions**

**A brief summary of the early and informal interventions available when addressing incidents of anti-social behaviour**

### **EARLY AND INFORMAL INTERVENTIONS**

Surveys have shown that over 80% of reported anti-social behaviour cases have been resolved through the use of early or informal interventions.

The use of early and informal interventions can establish clear standards of behaviour and reinforce the message that anti-social behaviour will not be tolerated.

In many cases, awareness of the impact of the behaviour and the threat of more formal enforcement can be enough to make the individual change their behaviour. The use of early intervention should always be considered in most cases, particularly those involving young people, however there may be situations where this is not the most appropriate approach (if the victim is at risk of harm) and the need to utilise formal sanctions is considered the correct response.

### **WARNINGS**

**Verbal warnings:** When deciding on a verbal warning then the relevant officer should consider the evidence supports the allegation that anti-social behaviour has occurred or is likely to occur, and that the behaviour is or will be unreasonable. A verbal warning should also make clear to the individual the impact the behaviour is having on the victim or community, and the consequences if the behaviour does not stop.

**Written warnings:** A written warning should contain the specific details of the behaviour or incident, why it is not acceptable and the impact the anti-social behaviour is having on the victim.

With both the verbal and written warnings, the agency issuing the warnings must keep a record in case the case goes to court and the warnings form part of the evidence presented.

### **COMMUNITY RESOLUTION**

'Community resolution' is the nationally recognised term for resolution of low level anti-social behaviour between the parties involved (victim and perpetrator) without going through the criminal justice system. It could be used with both youth and adult perpetrators and enables the police to deal with the behaviour in a timely and transparent manner, taking into account the needs of the victim, perpetrator and local community.

Community resolution is primarily aimed at first time perpetrators who are genuinely remorseful of their actions. They can also help to reduce re-offending by encouraging perpetrators to face the impact of their behaviour and take responsibility for their actions.

## **MEDIATION**

Mediation can be an effective tool for resolving cases of anti-social behaviour, bringing all parties together in a neutral environment. It can be most effective in neighbour disputes, family conflicts and lifestyle differences where it can be difficult to identify the victim and the perpetrator.

However mediation does not work if it is forced on those involved. For it to be a productive intervention all the parties must be willing 'to come to the table' and discuss their issues openly.

It is not for the mediator to establish solutions. The deliver long-term solutions the parties in dispute should reach agreement between themselves; the mediator is acting as the facilitator for this process.

## **ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR CONTRACTS (ABCs)**

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts can be an effective way of dealing with anti-social individuals where there are a number of problem behaviours. It can also be effective as an early intervention method for dealing with young people to help prevent behaviours escalating.

An Acceptable Behaviour Contract is a written agreement between the perpetrator and the lead agency. The terms of an Acceptable Behaviour Contract can include a requirement to stop doing something (being in a specific area at a specific time) or to start doing something (attend a particular club for a specific activity). It will also include details of what could happen if the contract is breached.

While an individual can not be forced to sign an Acceptable Behaviour Contract, refusal to do so may persuade a court that only a formal sanction will prevent anti-social behaviour. There is also no formal sanction for breaching an Acceptable Behaviour Contract, but the work undertaken as part of the drafting of the Acceptable Behaviour Contract can be presented as evidence to a court if an application for a civil injunction or order is made.

## **PARENTING CONTRACTS**

If informal interventions are being used against under 18s, the parents or guardians of the young person should be contacted in advance of any actions. In many cases the parent or guardian will play an important part in ensuring the young person manages and changes their behaviour. It may even be appropriate to include a role for the parent or guardian in the terms of an Acceptable Behaviour Contract.

If the behaviour of the parent or guardian is suspected as being part of the cause of the anti-social behaviour of the young person, a Parenting Contract could be considered.

As with any situation where there are concerns for the whole family officers must check with other relevant agencies such as social services, youth offending teams, family intervention partnerships etc prior to taking any actions. This will ensure that any support that is already in place for the family is aware of the situation.