

Putting the most vulnerable first: Reducing Anti-Social Behaviour



Contents

Executive summary	04
Introduction	05
The approach	07
Outcomes	09
Conclusion	10
Appendix 1	11
Thanks	11

Peabody and Family Mosaic

Peabody is one of the oldest and largest housing associations in London and the South-East, established in 1862 by the philanthropist, George Peabody. In 2017 we merged with Family Mosaic and now own and manage around 55,000 properties, providing quality homes and support services to 111,000 people. Our Care and Support arm is one of the largest providers in the South-East, helping 8,000 people to live a more independent life.

Our mission is to help people make the most of their lives by providing good quality affordable homes, working with communities, and promoting wellbeing. We distinguish ourselves by putting the most vulnerable first, creating great places where people want to live, and building resilience in people and communities. We plan to build 2,500 homes a year by 2021, directly addressing the housing crisis by maximising the number of low-cost rent and shared ownership homes we build.

As well as bricks and mortar, Peabody provides community programmes for the benefit of its residents and for people living in the surrounding neighbourhoods, including employment and training support; health and wellbeing projects; family support programmes; welfare benefits advice; and activities for younger and older people. This work aims to tackle poverty at its roots, supporting people to transform their lives and communities for the better.

The ASB pilot was launched prior to the merger with Peabody and the principles of the approach have been incorporated by the new Peabody.

Executive summary

Background

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) blights lives. People experiencing it can suffer depression, isolation and a range of other negative feelings that affect wellbeing. It can happen to anyone whatever their tenure, but people living in social housing have access to additional support to deal with it through their landlord.

Most housing providers define ASB as any conduct that causes nuisance or annoyance to others. It typically includes "low-level" noise nuisance from a resident playing loud music, dog fouling, or graffiti. It also includes an element of criminality, such as drug use, violence or abuse. For the lower level cases, social landlords have traditionally played an arbitration role, warning noisy neighbours about their behaviour, increasing security or attempting mediation. For more serious or persistent cases it is possible for landlords to evict tenants who are found to be engaging in ASB.

Finding new and more effective ways of resolving ASB cases is a priority for the social housing sector. This is partly because of the detrimental impact of ASB on individuals and the community. But also because of the time and resources it takes for staff to resolve issues that are often complex and multi-faceted. More broadly, ASB costs the tax-payer billions of pounds each year¹, whilst public sector and support budgets have reduced over many years. There are, therefore, personal, social and economic reasons to improve the efficacy of social landlords' response to ASB.

What we did

In 2016, Family Mosaic (now merged with Peabody) developed a new approach to ASB that separated the incident and the complainant's level of vulnerability. This led to a new policy which enabled us to effectively resolve both "low" and "high" level ASB cases more quickly and effectively, boosting resident satisfaction.

The new policy directed more resources to high level cases of ASB, cases with repeat complaints (or community triggers) or cases where safeguarding and / or vulnerability were a concern. At the same time, residents were supported to manage some low-level issues themselves to reduce escalation.

What we found

In 2017, we tested this new approach, initially for a six-month pilot period which was then extended for 12 months. Repeat ASB cases fell by a third and resident satisfaction doubled from the start of the pilot to the end of the year. The number of ASB cases fell by 36%, open cases reduced by 21% and the number of cases recorded by our customer care line fell by 25%. Over 82% of employees felt that the new approach was better than the old approach. The reduction in case workload, and an improved risk-assessment tool, enabled employees to focus their efforts on the most vulnerable residents and manage the most serious cases more effectively.

Since Family Mosaic merged with Peabody, this new approach towards ASB has been implemented across the new organisation, so that we can put our most vulnerable residents first and provide great places where people want to live. The purpose of this short summary is to share our findings as they may be of interest to others looking to review and enhance the way they tackle ASB.

Family Mosaic presented our initial findings from the new approach at a number of specialist ASB forums. This resulted in a number of Housing Associations and local authorities implementing the approach themselves. We have therefore included findings from one of those Housing Associations, Aster Housing, in this report.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-support-for-families/2010-to-2015-government-policy-support-for-families>

Introduction

Low-level ASB

In June 2016, Day in the Life (DILo)² analysis of Neighbourhood Managers' (NMs) activities revealed that they were spending an average of one day a week on anti-social behaviour (ASB) casework. Across the organisation, we discovered that NMs were handling 269 ASB cases. These were open for an average of 132 days. Resident satisfaction with our handling of ASB cases was 72%.

Two-thirds of the cases were either low-level noise complaints or neighbour disputes. And despite our intensive approach to handling these ASB cases, over one in five were reopened within 12 months of them having been closed. This approach was not working, so we investigated further.

We found that NMs were spending lots of time on intractable low-level issues that did not take into account wider factors. For example, it can be almost impossible for a landlord to resolve a complaint from a neighbour about noise from a television or children playing when the sound isn't actually at an unreasonable level. The issue may be more to do with sound insulation and low tolerance and not to do with ASB at all.

In a case like this, the landlord's involvement can actually escalate an issue between neighbours. Many NMs said that having spoken to an alleged perpetrator about a noise complaint they had received from a neighbour, the typical response was "why didn't they just come and speak to me about it rather than getting the landlord involved?" It became clear that cases can often escalate from this point into 'tit for tat' behaviour with the landlord becoming the referee in between.

Advice to the complainant on ways of engaging with their neighbours is preferable to making a noise complaint to the landlord. We created a suite of advice materials to encourage residents to take ownership of the issue in cases such as these, and found that results improved. Through improved signposting residents were also made aware of the other agencies available that would be better suited to help them (e.g. Environmental Health Noise Teams are the experts in dealing with noise complaints).

We also improved cross-team working to ensure that one-off instances of dog fouling or graffiti could be handled swiftly by an Estate Services Team – freeing up the time of Neighbourhood Managers to help people most at risk and vulnerable to persistent anti-social behaviour.

Crucially, low-level complaints were also subject to a vulnerability assessment.

Assessing vulnerability

In handing more responsibility and ownership to tenants we needed to ensure that vulnerable people were supported. We incorporated an updated assessment of vulnerability into our ASB process, taking into account the risk assessment matrix that was developed following the Fiona Pilkington case:

In 2007, Fiona Pilkington killed herself and her severely disabled 18-year-old daughter after suffering years of abuse from local youths. Fiona, her mother and other local residents had made multiple reports of anti-social behaviour (ASB) incidents to the police over the previous ten years. She had also contacted her local MPs and council for help, each of whom had also reported these incidents to the police. Despite this, nothing was done.

After her death, the Independent Police Complaints Commission found that Leicestershire police had repeatedly failed to identify Fiona, her daughter and her son as being vulnerable. Nor had they linked each individual complaint to a wider campaign of harassment against them. Consequently, each incident was merely classified as low-level ASB. There was no attempt to establish the vulnerability of the family, how they were coping and what support they might need.

One consequence of the case was that representatives from the police, housing, local authorities, social care and community safety jointly developed a risk assessment matrix that could be used across the UK. The matrix included a number of questions that should be asked whenever anyone reported an incident of ASB. Its aim was to help to establish a victim's level of vulnerability and provide guidance about what kind of support was available for them.

² A DILo is a minute by minute review of each and every activity performed by an individual as well as observations, quotes, comments or any other data collected by the person performing the study.

Introduction

continued

Under our new approach to ASB, we envisaged that NMs would only respond:

- To high level cases (when there was a criminal element involved, such as drugs, abuse or threatening behaviour)
- To repeated complaints, or community trigger³,
- To cases where safeguarding and vulnerability were a concern.

The new approach would enable employees to focus more time and resources on high level issues, while providing better advice to residents, so they would be able to deal with low level issues themselves. In low level cases, a risk assessment would still be conducted, enabling us to establish the vulnerability of the victim or complainant.

Before we put the new approach into practice, we consulted residents about the effectiveness and limitations of our

existing process. We interviewed a number of victims of ASB, asking them which of our processes had worked, and which ones had failed. When we explained the new approach to them, most residents were satisfied, with the proviso that high-level issues would be dealt with correctly the first time, rather than being closed down too quickly and not resolving the problem.

Following the consultation, we designed a new ASB policy and processes that would support the delivery of this new approach. New risk assessments were developed to enable call centre employees to assess the level of risk and vulnerability of anyone who reported an ASB issue. This also enabled NMs to conduct a deeper investigation of risk levels when they visited the complainant for the first time in person, including those whose issues were classified as a low level ASB case. If a complainant was assessed as having a low level ASB case, but with a high

level of risk, they would be supported by the tenant support process, and not the ASB process, ensuring we protected our most vulnerable tenants. Neighbourhood Managers would oversee these cases, but day-to-day management responsibility would be with Tenancy Sustainment Officers.

We introduced the new policy and processes initially through a six-month pilot period, between May and October 2017. All employees that were involved in the pilot were given intensive training on the new approach and also refreshed training on antisocial behaviour, case management and identifying vulnerable people via Capsticks Solicitors. At the end of the six months we re-evaluated the processes and adapted where necessary. The approach was then continued for a further six months.



³ <http://asbhelp.co.uk/community-trigger-anti-social-behaviour-crime-policing-act-2014>

The approach

In considering how best to redesign our new approach to ASB, we investigated best practice within the social housing sector. Hyde Housing, for example, had already removed low level ASB from their policy and introduced some signposting methods. We also talked with support agencies such as Victim Support and ASB Help so we could better understand the support needs of victims of ASB. We also discussed our new approach to managing ASB and identifying vulnerable people with the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC).

The method we took in redesigning our new approach included the following key stages:

- Redefining ASB
- Supporting the most vulnerable
- Empowering residents
- Delivering a better customer experience

Redefining ASB

The first stage of the pilot involved revising our definition of ASB, which was previously based on Shelter's definition:

“ASB is behaviour by one household or individual(s) in an area which threatens the physical or mental health, safety or security of other households or individuals. This can include noise or other action that disturbs or upsets other people in the neighbourhood.”

Our revised definition was developed in accord with Part 1 of the Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, which defines ASB as:

“Conduct capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to a person in relation to that person's occupation of residential premises.”

“Conduct capable of causing 'housing-related' nuisance or annoyance to any person.”

“Conduct that has caused, or is likely to cause, harassment, alarm or distress to any person.”



The approach

continued

This definition included ASB cases involving criminal activity (for example, assault, arson, hate crime), harassment and intimidation, group disorder and repeated, prolonged high-level noise nuisance. It did not include low level noise nuisance, neighbour disputes, parking issues, dog fouling or graffiti. The last three were to be dealt with through our existing estate services team⁴ during the pilot.

Supporting the most vulnerable

In focusing more on higher-level ASB cases, we were concerned that we might omit complainants who were vulnerable but who were not experiencing high-level ASB. To ensure this did not happen, we introduced a triage process to help us manage and determine the type of ASB incident, the number of reports made, and the level of vulnerability of the complainant.

We wanted the new approach to identify situations where a complainant had made several reports about the same issue or where multiple complainants made separate reports about the same perpetrator. This was called the 'trigger threshold'. We set this trigger threshold at three separate reports or complainants in a week, or five in one month. Once this trigger threshold was reached, we would open an ASB case. In addition, it ensured that even if complainants had not been rated as either high risk or vulnerable, if they persisted in making reports, we would be able to assess them for support.

There are three key roles in the ASB process; the Customer Care Line (CCL), the Tenancy Sustainment Officer (TSO) and the Neighbourhood Manager (NM).

As the first point of contact for most people reporting an ASB issue, whether by phone or online, the CCL was the appropriate place for the start of the triage process. We trained CCL employees on how to identify vulnerable people and how to use the new approach to ASB.

Tenancy Sustainment Officers provide support and advice to residents with complex needs that are too time intensive for NMs. They were best placed to provide help and advice to complainants or perpetrators who were assessed as being at a high risk of vulnerability.

Neighbourhood Managers continued to play a central role in all ASB cases that came through the initial triage. Where there was no ASB and a low vulnerability risk, the NM would still be notified, as they would have a more holistic view of any issues relating to the complaint. Where there was ASB or a high risk of vulnerability, the NM played a lead role in managing the case.

Empowering residents

Where the complaint was not classified as ASB, and there was a low risk of vulnerability, CCL signposted the caller to other relevant services. CCL employees were able to advise complainants about effective ways to approach their neighbour, as well as simple coping mechanisms. CCL also directed callers to the advice on the website and offered to send them 'Dear Neighbour Cards' (see appendix 1) that the complainant could fill in and send to the alleged perpetrator themselves.

Delivering a better customer experience

The triage process enabled our CCL employees to more effectively manage and route ASB calls as they came in. It also helped to set resident expectations from the start of the incident. CCL employees were able to inform them as to what would happen next as well as provide them with advice as to how to refer to other agencies where necessary. We also added advice and content to our website, allowing residents to more easily find information and report issues. It would then provide them with alternative solutions or contact details to other agencies they should be contacting. As a result, complainants' concerns about the length of time taken to resolve issues and additional dissatisfaction about communications on a low-level ASB case were removed.

⁴ The Estate Services Team at Family Mosaic were operatives that were responsible for the maintenance of environmental aspects of neighbourhoods. This includes general garden maintenance and caretaking services.

Outcomes

Reducing workload enabling employees to focus on more complex cases

Cases logged as ASB: reduced by 36% through the pilot

Between May 2016 and April 2017, there were 815 ASB cases logged. An average of 68 cases per month. Between May 2017, when the pilot started, and April 2018, there were 520 cases logged, an average of 43 cases per month.

Number of repeat cases: reduced by one third

From an average of 3 repeat cases in 2016/17 (with a high of 7) to an average of 1 repeat case for the same time period during the new approach (with a high of 2).

This reduction demonstrates that cases were being effectively resolved first time with clear expectations set with residents.

Number of open cases⁵: reduced by 21% through the pilot

Between May 2016 and April 2017, the number of open cases peaked in August 2016 with 304. By the end of April 2017, there were 220 open cases.

During the pilot, the number of open cases peaked in June 2017 with 234. By the end of April 2018, there were 173 open cases, an all-time record low.

The reduction demonstrates how NMs have been able to effectively manage their caseloads by giving them more time to focus on high level ASB cases.

“The new ASB pilot frees us up to deal with serious cases where FM can actually take action and make a difference in our residents’ lives”
Neighbourhood Manager

Number of ASB calls to CCL: reduced by 25% through the pilot

When speaking to CCL employees about why they thought there had been a reduction, they said that thanks to the training they had received and the new, clearer process, they were able to more effectively communicate with residents about their ASB issues. As NMs are managing cases more effectively and resolving them appropriately first time, complainants did not repeatedly call back and ask for the cases to be re-opened or to get updates about the progress of their cases.

“The process has been streamlined significantly at various stages and lends itself to organic conversations taking place with residents rather than a script to follow. Also having a clearer threshold for what we will and will not investigate allows employees to more confidently challenge low level or isolated reports which is more efficient.”
Customer Care Line Officer

Number of cases redirected: 1090 (an average of 91 cases per month)

⁵ We define open cases as all the ASB cases that are unresolved at the end of the month. This definition helps us to evaluate the case loads of each Neighbourhood Manager.

Outcomes

continued

Cases where complaints were assessed as involving low level ASB and low risk vulnerability were redirected either to advice services or other statutory bodies.

This had significant implications for employee time; 1,090 cases is the equivalent to the previous ASB caseload of over ten Neighbourhood Managers. This enables NMs to manage their workloads and focus on high level cases and supporting our most vulnerable residents.

Supporting our most vulnerable

From May 2017 to April 2018, 411 cases were identified as having a high risk/vulnerability factor. Although we do not have previous data to compare this to, 79% of employees have stated that the new approach improved their ability to identify vulnerable residents.

**“I feel it has given
a greater focus
to vulnerability”
Area Housing
Manager**

Delivering a better customer experience

Customer complaints – reduced by 33%

The data around complaints is clear. These are complaints that residents make about the service they have received from us, either directly to us or via local councillors and MPs. When we compare the figures between May 2016 and April 2017 with the figures between May 2017 and April 2018 (the pilot period) the number of upheld complaints fell by one third. And when we look at the nature of these upheld complaints, none of them related to the change in ASB policy or our new approach to ASB. In the five months since Aster Housing also implemented this approach they have seen no increase in customer complaints.

Employee feedback

At the end of the October 2017, six months after the pilot began, we surveyed all employees in teams that were involved in the process. Over 82% of employees felt that the new ASB pilot was better than the previous approach. Aster Housing also received positive feedback from their employees and commented that there was “a noticeable reduction in employee stress due to reduced workload”.

Conclusion

Our ASB pilot had a number of objectives. They were to:

- handle ASB cases more effectively,
- reduce the workload of our Resident Services employees,
- identify and support our most vulnerable residents,
- empower residents to effectively manage low level incidents themselves,
- ensure that those victims of high level anti-social behaviour received a more focused, dedicated service.

The results demonstrate that we have achieved all of these objectives. The quality of the service we deliver is improved, employees and residents are much happier with the new approach and we have managed to develop a process that saves time, money and reduces bureaucracy.

The ASB pilot allows us to support our most vulnerable residents through the new triage process, advanced risk assessments and tailored support for those who really need it.

The new approach also helps to build resilience in our residents by providing the tools and skills to address low level issues for themselves. This gives them a clearer understanding of where they should go to get the appropriate help they need which will be beneficial over the long-term.

We will continue to monitor its effectiveness.

Appendix 1

Thanks

Dear Neighbour

You may not be aware that I was disturbed by noise from your property
on (date) at (time)

I could hear your

TV | Music | Voice

Other

This meant I was unable to

Sleep | Hear my TV | My children were disturbed

Other

I'm sure you weren't aware you were causing a disturbance and I hope you will try to avoid it happening again so we can all enjoy living in our homes.

Thanks for your co-operation and Kind regards

Fig 2. Dear Neighbour cards

The cards were a polite way of enabling residents to address their issues with their neighbour without the need for confrontation. The cards did not contain Family Mosaic's name or logo anywhere as the premise was to empower residents to take their own reasonable action. CCL would also advise complainants on effective ways to approach their neighbour as well as some simple coping mechanisms they could use. The ASB section on Family Mosaic's website was also redesigned to give more in-depth advice to complainants specifically based on the type of ASB issue they were experiencing.

I would like to give special thanks to the following people / organisations for all of their advice, support and commitment to making this approach a reality.

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**Researched and written
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