

**Birkenhead Constituency Committee (Wirral Borough Council)****Evidence Review of Anti-Social Behaviour Interventions (May 2015)****BRIEFING PAPER**

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**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The aim of this paper is to review the available academic literature published on the effectiveness of interventions to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB). Where available, the cost benefit of interventions is also included.
- 1.2 Systematic and rigorous evaluation of interventions to reduce ASB will support informed decision making about future policies and programmes by Birkenhead Constituency Committee.
- 1.3 Appendix One summarises the results of the review and interventions are categorised as follows:
- Early Intervention
  - Interventions for at-risk youth
  - Coercive Interventions
  - Developmental Interventions
  - Situational and Diversionary Interventions

**2. Review Background**

- 2.1 Definitions of ASB range from those focusing on its impact (for example, according to the Scottish Affairs Committee Inquiry into Housing and Anti-Social Behaviour 1996, ASB is “behaviour by one household or individual that threatens the physical or mental health, safety or security of other households and individuals”) to those that specify the types of behaviours that can be considered anti-social (usually those for which anti-social behaviour orders have been granted). The latter often show variance in the range of behaviours included. This variance is exacerbated by differences in perceptions of what constitutes problematic behaviour. For example, in one neighbourhood dropping sweet wrappers may cause sufficient discontent to be seen as ASB, whereas in others people are more concerned about drug dealing.
- 2.2 The most widely used definition, and the one that this review uses as a point of reference, is that of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998), which defines ASB as “acting in a manner that caused, or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as [the defendant]”. This definition focuses on the impact of ASB and differentiates ASB from the more serious end of the criminal spectrum.

**3. Review parameters**

- 3.1 The review examines literature dealing with measures to prevent ASB amongst people of all ages (it will also examine the limited number of evaluations which analyse cost benefit). Most of the available and relevant research is on interventions to address youth offending. This is because young people are commonly considered to be the prime perpetrators of ASB acts (Campbell, 2002).
- 3.2 The majority of ASB literature on the effectiveness of interventions comes from North America and the United Kingdom, although some research has been undertaken in the Netherlands.
- 3.3 Evaluations ideally should include a control group, identify which part of the intervention work best for which people and in what circumstances, and will measure objective youth crime and antisocial behaviour outcomes over time.
- 3.4 It should be noted that overall, the volume of available research on the effectiveness of ASB interventions is limited. The development of the troubled families agenda has been supported by the publication of evaluations

#### **4. Key Findings**

- 4.1 The key findings from the studies reviewed and outlined in Appendix One can be summarised as follow:

##### **a. Early Interventions**

Early interventions aim to tackle risk factors from pregnancy to early childhood and have been found to be effective (Karoly et al, 1998; Greenwood et al, 1998).

##### **b. Interventions for at-risk youth**

Educational interventions to prevent the onset of offending in at-risk youth can prevent the onset of delinquency (Karoly 2003; Feinstein and Sabates 2005).

##### **c. Coercive Interventions**

Coercive interventions, such as detention and imprisonment, have been found to produce nil or even negative effects in reducing recidivism. Reliable evidence of the effectiveness of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) and anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) is limited. The limited evidence that is available indicates that they are expensive (Audit Commission, 2013) and should be used as a last resort complemented by preventive measures to address the underlying cause of ASB (Campbell, 2002; Prior and Paris, 2005; Youth Justice Board, 2001).

##### **d. Developmental Interventions**

Developmental and rehabilitative interventions can significantly reduce the rate of recidivism amongst young offenders. Intensive family based interventions in-particular have a positive outcome in the reduction of ASB (Lipsey and Wilson, 1998; Lipsey, 2000; Feilzer, 2004; Woolfenden et al, 2004; Ross et al, 2001; Prior and Paris, 2005; Kurki, 2000; Coester, 2002; Nyostrom, 2003; Dillane et al, 2001; Westminster City Council, 2010; Lloyd et al, 2011).

## **e. Situational and Diversionary Interventions**

Situational interventions aim to reduce the opportunity to commit crime for example by improving street lighting, which has been found to be effective (Farrington and Welsh, 2002; Ross et al, 2011). Diversionary interventions have also been shown to have an impact on ASB.

## **5. Summary**

- 5.1 Based on the available evidence reviewed, preventative interventions (particularly interventions focused on early years and developmental factors) appear to have the most significant impact on anti-social behaviour outcomes.
- 5.2 As well as the quality of the research evidence (e.g. randomised controlled trials are considered the gold standard) the effectiveness of different interventions also needs to be considered. It will depend on:
- How they are delivered (e.g. multi-agency delivery)
  - Who they are delivered to (e.g. targeted v universal)
  - Where they are delivered (e.g. needs based)
- 5.3 Key to a programme's success is how well it is implemented. A well implemented but less effective programme can outperform a more effective programme that has been poorly implemented. This is difficult to ascertain from an evidence review but needs to be a key consideration in the development of future interventions.

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