

West Kent Housing Association

Scrutiny panel review

Community safety: Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

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Amended April 2024

1. Executive summary

The West Kent Scrutiny Panel conducted a review into how cases of anti-social behaviour (ASB) are managed, with a particular focus on communication provided by West Kent during the process. The review involved analysing data from a variety of sources, both qualitative and quantitative, to inform the review and recommendations.

The panel recognise that West Kent staff are already committed to tackling ASB and making neighbourhoods safe places for all residents. However, they found that residents often find the time to a satisfactory resolution can be extensive, and they are not always aware of the ongoing work that West Kent are doing to manage their case.

In some cases, there is a misperception of the power that West Kent has, and the significant amount of time and evidence required to apply for legal intervention. It is believed that some residents may not fully understand the process, and this is a cause of dissatisfaction with the case handling.

Following the review of information provided, the panel developed a total of eight recommendations relating to the handling of ASB cases. This report focusses on the outcomes that were accepted. The key messages in this report are about improving communication and the ongoing relationship between West Kent and the residents that report cases of ASB. The panel focused their recommendations on communication at the beginning, end, and throughout the ASB case. They also made a recommendation for further ways to support residents experiencing ASB, adopting a victim-centred approach to identifying where referrals to other support services would be required.

The scrutiny panel will receive updates on the implementation of recommendations and a progress review will be held in six months' time. The quarterly panel meetings include performance and satisfaction data, which will provide an ongoing signal of any improvements in satisfaction scores for ASB cases.

2. Introduction

West Kent's scrutiny panel was formed in 2020 and currently consists of six residents. The panel meet quarterly to understand and analyse performance and satisfaction information and recommend ways in which West Kent can improve services for residents.

Previous reviews conducted by the scrutiny panel include reviews into West Kent's training and employment service, repairs service, and a review on how West Kent hears the voice of residents. For their fourth review, the scrutiny panel decided to review anti-social behaviour (ASB) and the communication provided during the ASB case process. This topic was chosen as a result of lower satisfaction scores in this area.

In March 2023, the UK government published its Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan, detailing measures it would take to deal with anti-social behaviour and highlighting the role of housing associations and landlords to ensure that no one lives in misery with anti-social neighbours.

The new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) include measures on responsible neighbourhood management, including satisfaction with handling ASB, so there is an increased focus on landlords being transparent and reporting on how they perform in this area.

Anti-social behaviour comes in many forms such as unwanted noise, abusive behaviour, littering, or illegal drug taking, and can cause serious distress to residents. The 'Charter for social housing residents: social housing white paper' recognises that social housing residents are more likely to be victims of crime and experience ASB.

West Kent has a dedicated community safety team that are responsible for investigating reports of anti-social behaviour (ASB), crime, and community safety matters. They make use of all powers that are available to them to resolve complaints of ASB, and work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that the most appropriate action is taken. The team have a Community Safety Manager, Sean Richards, who is responsible for the work of West Kent in tackling ASB and crime, to improve the communities they serve.

West Kent sends a feedback survey to all residents who have a community safety case at the point it closes. The decision to look at this area was taken based on consistently low response rates to these feedback surveys. When survey responses are received, there is consistent feedback about:

- A lack of communication during the process.
- Issues not being resolved – where there are cases of long term ASB, the negative feedback is about outcome rather than how the case was handled.

Six panel members contributed to this review, with one nominated review lead:

- Jason Purtell (Review lead)
- Linda Lee
- Carolina De Andrade
- Fen Stanley
- Cathy Morgan
- Hans May

This report will outline the specific questions the scrutiny panel wanted to answer when considering why responses to feedback requests for ASB are low.

It will describe the various sources of research conducted by the scrutiny panel and their findings which support the recommendations made. It is hoped that each

recommendation will have an impact on resident satisfaction with West Kent's handling of ASB cases, and increase the number of feedback responses received.

3. Definition of Terms

Source – This is the person who has experienced the ASB.

Subject - This is the person who the allegation of anti-social behaviour has been made against.

4. Review aims.

The panel wanted to understand the pathway of communication that happens when a case of ASB is reported, and how the source experiences the contact from West Kent.

When scoping the review, the panel agreed on the overarching questions they wanted to answer:

- *How does West Kent communicate its anti-social behaviour policy, processes and procedures to residents?*
- *How can communication be improved throughout the anti-social behaviour process?*

5. Methodology

This review was conducted over a period of six months with some unavoidable breaks to allow for the new Cx system to be implemented and a changeover in resident involvement staff within West Kent.

Data from a variety of sources, both qualitative and quantitative, was collected and analysed to inform the review and recommendations.

5.1 Staff presentations and information

The panel met regularly with Sean Richards, Community Safety Manager where he:

- Explained the full process that is followed when ASB cases are raised. Including the triage process, ongoing management of the case, and communication with the victim/source throughout the case. The panel were particularly interested in the standards for contact and how regularly contact is made with a source. They had questions about the risk assessment process and asked to see a copy of the risk assessment form that is used.
- Detailed the benefits and impact the new Cx system has had on the work of the community safety team when handling ASB cases. The scrutiny panel asked for an explanation of how ASB cases are highlighted in the new system and how tasks are flagged for action.

- Demonstrated the ASB app to show how it is used to record evidence of noise related ASB and the ease of sending it directly to the West Kent staff member handling the case. The scrutiny panel experienced using the app during the demonstration to record noise and the ease of sharing it with West Kent. They listened to the quality of the recording from the app, and the quality of the downloaded version that West Kent receive, and discussed how this technology improves the process and accuracy of recording noise complaints.

5.2 Data and information

The panel also received:

- TSM report for September 2023 for Low Cost Rental Accommodation (LCRA)
 - - *How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with West Kent's approach to handling anti-social behaviour?*
- TSM report for September 2023 for Low Cost Home Ownership (LCHO)
 - - *How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with West Kent's approach to handling anti-social behaviour?*
- TSM Benchmarking briefing from Acuity for April – June 2023
- ASB documentation from other housing providers, such as:
 - Stockport Homes
 - Metropolitan Thames Valley
- ASB case data November 2021 to August 2023

The panel receive information quarterly on West Kent's performance and satisfaction results, so this also informed this review.

5.3 Desktop research

The panel completed research on West Kent's website, checking its ease of use and functionality.

The panel also received and reviewed:

- West Kent's Community Safety Procedure 2022
- Community Safety Policy & Procedure – Summary guide
- The anti-social behaviour risk assessment
- A blank tenancy agreement
- An anti-social behaviour incident diary
- Template correspondence for source
- Template correspondence for subject
- Template referral forms
- Template correspondence for legal applications
- Template correspondence for case closure

5.4 Case studies

The panel received three anonymised case studies from ASB cases that were reported to West Kent between January 2020 and September 2023.

These case studies were provided by the Community Safety Manager and included a post closure evaluation for each case.

6. Findings and recommendations

The panel reviewed the information they received and focused their findings on the questions raised in the scoping meeting to develop seven recommendations relating to improvements in communication throughout the handling of ASB cases.

The panel provided feedback to the Community Safety Manager during their time working on this review and immediate improvements were made with the launch of CX. These improvements form the eighth recommendation which has already been actioned but is still an outcome of the review and is therefore included in the final report.

Accepted Recommendations

- **Mediation for ASB cases to be facilitated earlier in the ASB process**

When a case of ASB is reported to West Kent, the Community Safety Co-ordinator (CSC) will contact the source to triage the case and complete an initial action plan with the source. The CSC will make an assessment as to whether the source should discuss their concern with the subject first. In cases of ASB that are categorised as medium or standard risk when risk assessed (see Appendix A), such as noise or littering, it is thought to be possible that the subject may not realise they are causing a nuisance. The hope is that some cases can be resolved immediately through informal conversation between the source and subject.

The panel agree that looking for ways to settle the situation early is a positive approach but feel that some people may be reluctant to make this first contact with their neighbour. If a resident has contacted West Kent to report the situation, then this would suggest they require support to deal with it.

The panel recommend that, when a source is hesitant to make this first contact, West Kent should arrange a meeting with both parties to facilitate that early conversation. They feel this support could resolve more ASB cases earlier in the process.

This recommendation is understood but West Kent feel it would be more empowering of residents to provide them with the skills to enable effective communication with neighbours. This could be through helpful guides, videos or training, and the Community safety Team will work with West Kent mediation to design some resources. Resident safety is most important and West Kent will look at defining what cases would be reasonable for residents to adopt this process.

- **Explanation of possible outcomes to be made clearer**

The panel reviewed the satisfaction scores following completed ASB cases, and data for ASB related complaints received between November 2021 and August 2023. They examined a series of complaints that, when investigated, were not agreed by West Kent because it was found that all actions had been appropriately taken as per the community safety policy and procedure. This type of complaint suggests to the panel that it is possible sources have unrealistic expectations of what West Kent's powers are when dealing with ASB cases.

It is felt that these misunderstandings about what authority West Kent has, and the timeframes required for certain legal actions to take place, would have a direct link to the low response rate to satisfaction surveys, and the feedback that is received. There is also a concern from the panel that these misunderstandings may cause a negative perception of West Kent's handling of ASB and a potential for some residents to become reluctant to report all cases of ASB.

The recommendation of the panel is to introduce a clear and simple format to explain the actions West Kent can take when handling ASB cases. They advise this is provided to each source of ASB at the point a case is reported, and it's important there is a conversation to ensure understanding.

- **Additional support offered at first contact to all sources**

West Kent's Community Safety Policy and Procedure states they will "signpost residents to support agencies and statutory agencies when dealing with community safety reports". However, within this policy and procedure, there is no current guidance for when or how the need for additional support services will be identified and offered.

Signposting is specifically mentioned in the policy where West Kent identify that the source has a vulnerability, but the panel feel that signposting could potentially benefit *all* sources in improving general wellbeing and resilience at a stressful time. Questions 10 to 13 of the risk assessment ask for details of how the source feels they are being affected by the ASB, and what support they have already. A natural continuation of this questioning would be to offer additional support services at this stage.

Given the likely impact of ASB, the panel recommend that additional support is offered at the point of triage and risk assessment, and to all sources of an ASB case.

It's recognised by the panel that many people may decline the offer of additional support, but they feel it is important that is offered to all sources early in the process, so those who would benefit are not being overlooked.

- **Improved standards for communication frequency**

On reviewing the descriptions of complaints relating to ASB, the panel identified recurring themes of sources feeling that there are delays in West Kent's handling of their case, or having to wait for calls back from West Kent staff. The panel recognise the policy standard for ensuring that sources of ASB are kept up to date at least every two weeks but feel that two weeks can seem like a long time for some people when they are experiencing continuous ASB. There is also the concern that where sources are calling customer services for updates, they are adding unnecessary pressure to that team.

It is understood that there are times when there may not be a detailed update to offer the source, but they feel that communication should take place every time there is an update or action, for example a letter sent to the subject, so that the source is always aware of the work that West Kent is doing. The panel feel that regular updates will improve the relationship and the confidence that West Kent are doing all that they can to support the source. ***Therefore, the panel's recommendation is that the source is updated promptly whenever a new action has been completed, and that each contact should end with confirmation of when to expect the next contact from West Kent.*** This should mean that the source is always kept up to date and never left wondering when they will next be speaking with the person handling their case.

- **Improvements to accessing resources on West Kent website (already actioned)**

Early in the review the panel identified that finding information relating to ASB on West Kent's website was not easy.

The launch of Cx provided an opportunity to resolve this, now, when a resident reports ASB they are sent an email with their case number and a link to the ASB policy and procedure on the website. This was considered a satisfactory solution, and this recommendation was actioned during the course of the review.

Summary and next steps

The key messages in this report are about improving communication and the ongoing relationship between West Kent and the residents that report cases of ASB.

Throughout this review, the panel have been very positive about the work that West Kent already does to tackle ASB and make neighbourhoods safe places for all residents. There is no doubt that ASB is taken seriously and acted upon professionally. When making comparisons with the policies and procedures of other housing providers, there were very few differences to be found in how ASB cases are handled, and it is felt that the low response to satisfaction surveys is unlikely to be a problem that is unique to West Kent but is a consequence of the emotional impact of the experience.

The relationship between residents who report ASB and the staff at West Kent who investigate and manage the cases has a direct impact on the satisfaction at case closure. Recommendations have been made with this relationship in mind, with a focus on more face-to-face contacts with sources and more wrap around support from other agencies to improve wellbeing outcomes.

Managing expectations is another key message, with the panel recommending that it would be beneficial for West Kent to do more to make it explicitly clear what actions are available and provide realistic timeframes and outcomes. For a source to provide a good satisfaction score they need to feel that West Kent has done everything they can to support their case, and the feeling is that sometimes the expectation is for more than is reasonably possible.

There is a table of all recommendations related to the review and responses from relevant heads of service across West Kent.

A progress report on recommendation implementation will be provided to the panel and communities and housing committee in six months (August 2024).

A resident copy of this report will be published on the West Kent website.