



Inspecting policing  
in the public interest



**Anti-social Behaviour:  
Stop the rot**

***“This might be controversial but I actually think it almost softens what it actually is. It’s just a throwaway term people use. It’s something that’s actually quite unacceptable”***

– Shrewsbury woman<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Over the past three years there have been several high profile cases (Garry Newlove – Warrington, Fiona Pilkington and her daughter Francessca - Leicester, David Askew - Manchester) where some failure to grip anti-social behaviour (ASB) has led to tragic consequences.

We must not underestimate the extent of ASB, or ignore the fact that it is one of the public’s top concerns when it comes to crime and disorder locally<sup>2</sup>. It is estimated that the public only report just over a quarter of incidents of ASB to the police – about 28 percent<sup>3</sup>. Even this low reporting rate led to around 3.5 million calls to police in 2009-10. By way of comparison, around 4.3<sup>4</sup> million crimes were recorded in the same period.

It can be seen that whilst the level of reported ASB varies around the country it is a problem that impacts everywhere. Reported incidents to the police have not been published before – they add another dimension to the ‘perception’ of anti-social behaviour data already available via the British Crime Survey. They show different dimensions of the same problem – both are useful.

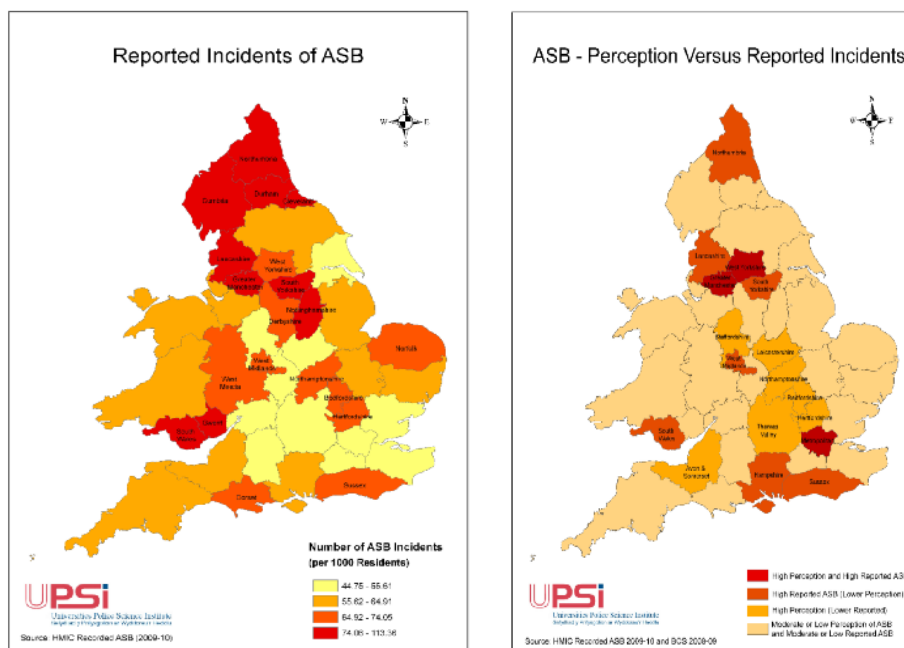


Figure 1

<sup>1</sup> Policing and Anti Social Behaviour: The Public Perspective, Ipsos MORI 2010 p14

<sup>2</sup> British Crime Survey 07/08

<sup>3</sup> British Crime Survey 07/08

<sup>4</sup> Home Office Statistics Bulletin – Crime In England & Wales (July 2010) p12

Measures of reported and perceived ASB have different strengths and weaknesses and should be available in the round where they provide useful 'intelligence' on what is happening. When they overlap with higher crime areas they point towards areas of greater need, see figure 4.

## What Works

ASB is a blight on the lives of millions who are directly affected; on the perceptions of millions more for whom it signals neglect in their neighbourhoods and the decline of whole towns and city areas; and the reputation of the police who are often thought to be unconcerned or ineffectual. We need a new start. HMIC's analysis offers such a beginning for a "What Works" strategy utilising the best elements of early and appropriate interventions coupled with longer term problem solving focussed on delivery for the victim.

ASB is not intractable. Through extensive research supported by MORI and Cardiff University, HMIC has identified systemic problems which affect the current strategy for dealing with ASB. These include:

- a lack of understanding of the intensity of harm to communities and vulnerable individuals caused by ASB;
- the lack of a comprehensive knowledge base of 'what works' for police and partners in stopping this problem; and
- an uncertainty about what priority to give ASB and what the police are seeking to achieve.

## Defining ASB

The core difficulty in developing a coherent response to ASB is the breadth of the term and the fact that it means different things to different people and organisations.

For victims of ASB, the experience tends to be a cumulative, corrosive issue that undermines their ability to live in peace. Those who suffer ASB experience varied levels of harm. But in nearly all cases, repeat victims experience far higher levels of impact. This is exacerbated and amplified for repeat victims who define themselves as disabled and/or suffer ill-health.<sup>5</sup>

For some agencies and academics, the problem is ASB's lack of precise definition.

For others, it is the confusing overlap of matters that clearly qualify as ASB, but also as crime, such as litter and vandalism. (See appendix A for national ASB breakdown 2009-10.)

The reality is that ASB is a mixed bag of crime, disorder, and their precursors, with rowdy/disorderly behaviour being the overwhelming majority of reported events - 2.1<sup>6</sup> million calls 2009-10.

The truth is that despite its high public profile in recent years, ASB does not have the same status as 'crime' for the police. There are consequences to this.

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<sup>5</sup> Re-thinking the policing of anti social behaviour, Innes and Weston (2010) p24

<sup>6</sup> National Standard for Incident Recording Annual Data Return 2009/10

Very importantly, the public draw no meaningful distinction between crime and ASB. They exist on the same spectrum of bad or very bad behaviour<sup>7</sup>. The public find it immaterial that the most insidious individual incidents of ‘pestering’, ‘taunting’ or ‘targeting’ individuals – including the most vulnerable - may not qualify technically as “crimes” with a prospect of prosecution. They dislike ASB, worry about reporting it, and are intimidated in significant numbers when they do<sup>8</sup>.

However, for some people in policing and some outside, dealing with issues that qualify as crime is ‘real police work’. After all, for almost 20 years the police record of accomplishment and failure has been expressed, increasingly strongly, in terms of crime statistics. Meanwhile, the “non-qualifying” ASB issue, and its variants, that signal lack of control on our streets, have grown and evolved in intensity and harm.

## Understanding the intensity and impact of ASB

The figure below illustrates the relationship between frequency and the harm caused. It is of note that an increase in harm is often the consequence of the behaviours becoming more focussed on individuals. Worryingly the most intense form – the targeting of individuals, their families and homes, follows their initial complaint to the authorities.<sup>9</sup>

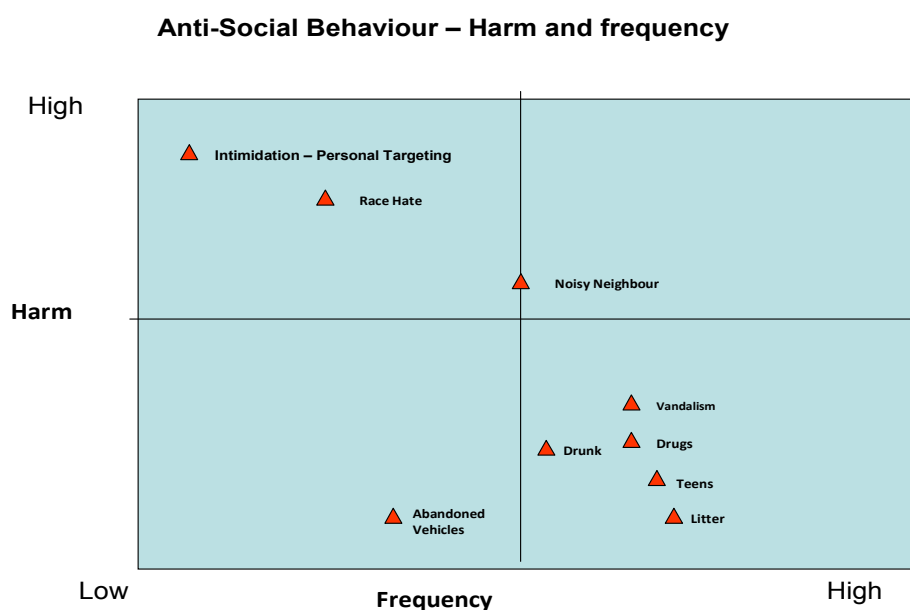


Figure2

The impact of these behaviours is that people change their way of life to cope with and avoid them.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Policing anti-social behaviour: the public perspective, pg 5, Ipsos MORI, August 2010

<sup>8</sup> ‘Policing anti-social behaviour: the public perspective, pg 6, Ipsos MORI, August 2010

<sup>9</sup> derived from ‘Re-thinking the policing of anti social behaviour, Innes and Weston (2010) p20

**In what ways would you say that your daily routine is affected by fear of anti-social behaviour in the area that you live? (Top ten mentions).**

Avoid certain areas/streets	<b>48</b>
Avoid walking/staying out at night/going out at night	<b>41</b>
Take precautions/more aware/more vigilant	<b>30</b>
Avoid groups/gangs of youths/school children	<b>27</b>
Noise affects sleep/health/work	<b>16</b>
Do not use public transport	<b>8</b>
Worry about carrying cash/valuables/using cash machines	<b>8</b>
Worry about damage to car/property	<b>3</b>
Avoid going out alone/ being alone	<b>2</b>
Worry about family members/children	<b>2</b>

*Base: All those saying fear of anti-social behaviour affects their routine 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' (2,045)*

Figure 3

In the context of 'crime control' and its association with crime statistics, ASB is relatively important, However, it has over time become a second order consideration as has keeping the peace. The issues and resolutions arising from the policing of ASB have not counted or been counted in the same way as those relating to crimes. Nevertheless, if there is any doubt about ASB's growing importance as an indicator of failure to control the streets, consider how the term 'happy slapping', random street violence, in some extreme cases the cause of death, has entered the nation's consciousness. We need to examine the impact of the drift away from maintaining order by presence, persuasion, communication, cajoling and when needed coercion, though often short of physical force, to a model principally geared around control and the use of powers.

It is time to take stock and change.

## **There have been improvements**

HMIC acknowledges that a great deal of effort has been made over recent years. This includes the development of legislative powers and programmes, most notably the 'Respect' programme. Though the take up, knowledge and use of the available and appropriate powers is variable<sup>10</sup>, the combination of Respect and increasingly aware police forces, has made a difference. Whilst the perception of the prevalence of ASB has fallen the issue has resolutely remained a top concern for the public. To fully understand the damage ASB causes we should take account of the victim perspective in order to better assess the harm and encourage those suffering to come forward.

<sup>10</sup> National Audit Office: Tackling Anti Social Behaviour 2006 p5

It is of note that the perception of ASB does not always match the reported levels<sup>11</sup> but the greatest impact is likely to be felt where both the perception and the reality are high. This is further exacerbated where the levels of crime are also high emphasising that some areas of the country have significantly higher needs than others<sup>12</sup>, as indicated below.

		Recorded ASB per 1000 pop.		
		Higher	Moderate	Lower
Recorded crime per 1000 pop.	Higher	Greater Manchester Nottinghamshire Gwent South Yorkshire Cleveland South Wales Northamptonshire	West Yorkshire West Midlands Merseyside	Metropolitan Leicestershire Humberside Thames Valley
	Moderate	<b>Bedfordshire</b> <b>Durham</b> Lancashire	Derbyshire Dorset Sussex Hampshire Cambridgeshire Avon and Somerset Cheshire	North Wales Lincolnshire Gloucestershire Staffordshire
	Lower	<b>Northumbria</b> West Mercia Norfolk Cumbria	Hertfordshire Dyfed Powys Suffolk North Yorkshire	Devon and Cornwall Surrey Wiltshire Kent Warwickshire Essex

Figure 4

Northumbria, Durham and Bedfordshire emerge as particularly interesting areas in that they have high perceptions of ASB and high recorded ASB, but moderate to low crime levels. In total, there are seven forces that can be identified where recorded ASB is relatively high compared with recorded crime levels.

In order to kick-start a new and more effective response to ASB our research is heavily victim focussed, using the largest survey to date<sup>13</sup> (5,699 respondents) of those who have experienced the effects of anti social behaviour first hand. This is supplemented by HMIC qualitative research, together with material from the British Crime Survey.

Together it identifies good work and improvement in the handling and attention which police give to ASB. For example, **where police take timely action**, the satisfaction of the bulk of victims is comparatively high with 83 percent being satisfied with police action.

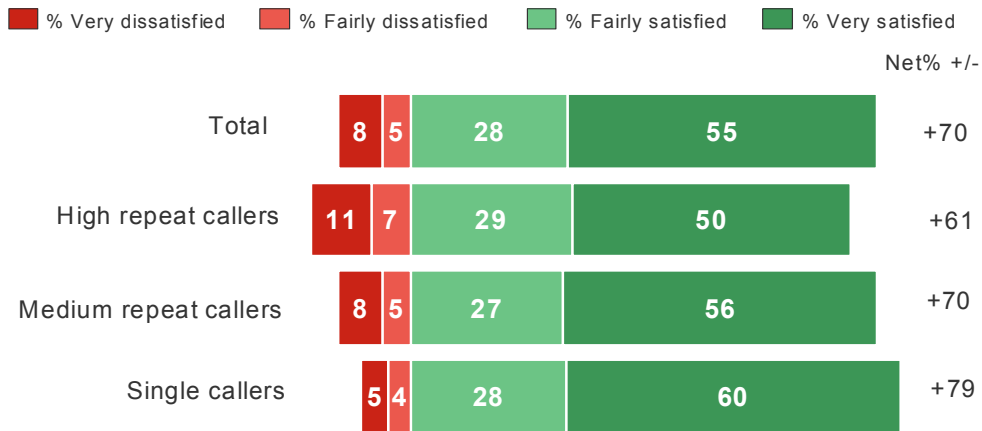
<sup>11</sup> Re-thinking the policing of anti social behaviour, Innes and Weston (2010) p18

<sup>12</sup> Re-thinking the policing of anti social behaviour, Innes and Weston (2010) p31

<sup>13</sup> Ipsos MORI, August 2010 p2

## Satisfaction with police action

Q How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the action taken by the police?



Base: All who say that the police took action as a result of their call (2,129). Fieldwork dates: 4 May – 3 June 2010  
Ipsos MORI

Figure 5

The number of police forces that have ASB as a force priority has grown from 20 in January 2010 to all 43 (September 2010). Whilst the victim survey is large, the sample size, save for a few of the larger forces, are only indicative, but reveal differences across the country.

## Variability in satisfaction

The variability in satisfaction with the service given to victims across the country is wide, with the difference between the best performers and the worst being in the range of 20 percentage points.

Satisfaction Measure	High %	Low %
Police listened to what you had to say	94	72
Satisfied with how police handled call	79	52
Call made a difference to problem	63	43

Figure 6

## The victims' perspective

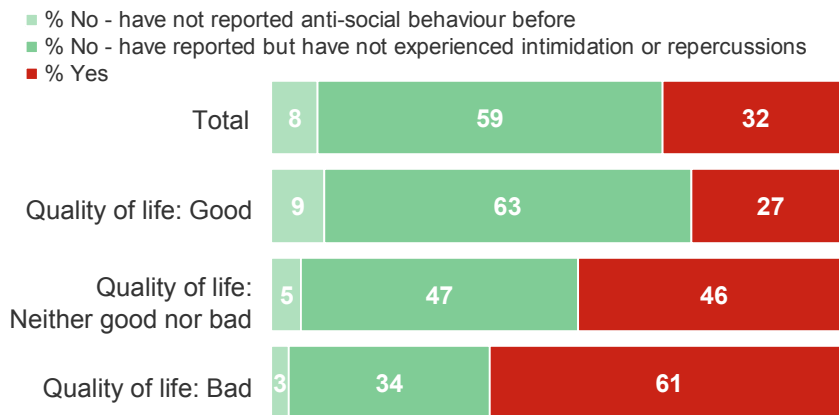
The key findings were:

- Most people rely heavily on the police to deal with ASB, despite the responsibilities of other agencies (90 percent of the victim survey cite police as responsible with local authorities, at 36 percent, a 'distant second').
- There is inadequate understanding of the serious impact of ASB on the quality of people's lives and the way it changes everyday behaviour particularly, but not exclusively, in deprived areas. For example, people avoid using the streets, avoid staying out late at night, and avoid groups of youths.

- There are significant areas of need involving very vulnerable people. For example, 29 percent of our victim survey identified themselves as having a ‘long standing illness, disability or infirmity’<sup>14</sup>.
- The level of reporting of ASB is affected by the victim’s confidence in the police. Repeat calls can lead to a ‘spiral of corroding confidence’<sup>15</sup>.
- Intimidation is often a consequence of reporting ASB with, in some cases, over 60 percent of victims being targeted.

## Experience of intimidation

Q Have you ever experienced intimidation or repercussions as a result of reporting anti-social behaviour?



Base: 5,699 individuals in England and Wales recorded as having called the police to report anti-social behaviour in September 2009.  
Fieldwork dates: 4 May – 3 June 2010

Ipsos MORI



Figure 7

Intimidation occurs everywhere for those who complain about ASB and that intensifies the problem and discourages people. Even the better areas are not immune.

## Risk

- There are four factors, any one of which indicates significant risk when ASB is involved. If they appear together, very considerable problems may be present. They are:
  1. Repeat victims
  2. Illness and disability
  3. People who are at home for lengthy periods
  4. Areas of particular deprivation
- Even though people who contact the police are comparatively highly satisfied, this depends heavily upon the timeliness of response to their call, actual attendance, and the effectiveness of action taken.

<sup>14</sup> Those that self defined and reported ASB not those who were targeted because of an illness or disability

<sup>15</sup> Re-thinking the policing of anti social behaviour, Innes and Weston (2010) p25



## What works – police systems

Of the various different police approaches and processes in relation to ASB, our analysis suggests **that three are critical** if forces want to deliver a more effective service for victims.

- Briefings on ASB for all staff likely to deal with the issue (including neighbourhood, response and CID officers)
- Tracking what is happening locally using data and intelligence
- The problem-solving capacity of neighbourhood policing teams.

Unsurprisingly, police leadership and the priorities that leaders set also matter, but this must be underpinned by proper analysis of the problem, a knowledge of what works and a willingness to, if necessary, step out of accepted structures to take timely and appropriate action. However, ‘priority’ has a different meaning and is subsequently dealt with differently in different forces – matters which should be tested by police authorities.

## What doesn’t work

Victims are adversely affected by

- graded response systems that prioritise calls for attendance (or non-attendance in the case of ASB); and
- lengthy partnership processes which have distinctive significant negative consequences for victims. Indeed delay can amount to inaction from the victim’s perspective.

Repeat victims, (71 percent of the 5,699 surveyed), are more dependant on the quality and focus of police systems than those who have only called once (29 percent of those surveyed).

It should be noted that “calls for service” are managed by way of attendance criteria, and a graded priority response<sup>16</sup> often leaving grading decisions to control room operators who may be unaware of the history or the impact of the behaviour being reported.<sup>17</sup> This has been the accepted method for many years, and has been recommended to the police by many agencies, including HMIC. However, the analysis showing the impact on public outcomes and satisfaction cannot be ignored. Those forces with the best systems and processes are not always those who have the greatest demand and, where systems are poor, the chances of those cases, where the risk to individuals is greatest, not being properly addressed are necessarily increased.

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<sup>16</sup> HMIC Inspection Findings 2010 p5

<sup>17</sup> HMIC Inspection Findings 2010 p4

## Partnerships

In looking at partnerships, albeit in a fashion limited by the availability of robust data,<sup>18</sup> there were some worrying indications that some partnerships are much less effective than accepted wisdom would have it. Checks were undertaken on the progress of a number of cases in a sample of Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) across the country. They appear to indicate:

- Standards of service were significantly variable, with some delivering only marginal benefits.
- Some partnerships were focussed on working together, not working for the public.
- Some focus on strategy rather than delivery.
- Many interventions took significant amounts of time to be delivered.
- An escalation of interventions, coupled with a culture of meetings, meant that some problems were not gripped and as a result victimisation continued.
- The focus in many was on the strategy and process rather than the victim's experience.
- There was little in the way of testing the value for money in approaches undertaken.

This is worrying. The investment in partnership endeavours should be questioned in terms of outcomes for the public. That is not to say that long term solutions are not desirable, but the balance between early action and resolution and longer term investments in delivering the best outcomes for victims needs revisiting. The current oversight of partnership performance by local authorities provides a degree of scrutiny but does not necessarily guarantee transparent and accessible information for the public on how well the CSP is delivering timely, appropriate and cost effective interventions to reduce ASB. The taking of timely actions cannot be underestimated. When action is taken, confidence in the police and local services amongst victims is 47 percent and when no action is taken this falls to 27 percent.<sup>19</sup>

The role of Neighbourhood Policing Teams cannot be underestimated and a refocusing on the reassurance model and the tackling of signal crimes will enable communities to take back the public domain from which some feel they have been excluded and driven.<sup>20</sup> The analysis shows that it is such actions that work; whether based on persuasion, coercion or enforcement (all of which have their place) and not educational literature and marketing.

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<sup>18</sup> Re-thinking the policing of anti social behaviour, Innes and Weston (2010) p39

<sup>19</sup> Re-thinking the policing of anti social behaviour, Innes and Weston (2010) p34

<sup>20</sup> Re-thinking the policing of anti social behaviour, Innes and Weston (2010) p45

## Conclusion

All of this adds up to a wide variation in outcomes with some current responses making matters worse, eg downgrading calls; and long-winded, invisible partnership processes.

Out of 43 forces, only 22 have IT systems that help them to identify and prioritise repeat calls, at the time of the report being made, and just 16 forces can effectively identify vulnerability. This falls to only 13 forces that can effectively identify those most at risk, repeat vulnerable callers, at the time the call is made. This leads to uncertainty of just what priority ASB should or could be given by police forces. It takes little imagination to understand the potential impact of limited IT systems and of decisions to 'grade out' calls.

This situation has also contributed to an increasing acceptance or "defining down" of ASB that we should not have grown used to (this is not the same as increasing tolerance of ASB, although some places are more tolerant than others).

HMIC's view is that we now know enough about ASB to reconsider our strategic choices for the next phase of effort on this blight on people's lives. Change is not optional. Essentially there are two ways forward.

The first is the least difficult, and draws on the evidence of the different intensity of the impact that ASB has on particular groups of people and in particular areas, together with 'what works best' in police systems. This highlights the importance of a timely action-orientated approach. It points up an opportunity to develop and focus police and partnership effort – surely an advantage in austere times – because we can be better informed and focussed now. This damage limitation approach will probably deliver 'better treatment' of the issues, but it is unlikely to stem the growth of a problem that has grown over the years to the dismay of the public.

However, there is an alternative which offers the prospect of nipping much more of the problem in the bud. This is an **early intervention strategy**, similar to those in health and education sectors. It will require reform of police availability and a refocusing on what causes **harm** in communities, rather than what is or is not a "crime", or what can be managed out of police systems.

Make no mistake, it requires feet on the street. However, as we showed in 'Valuing the Police' (published July 2010), on average there are 11 percent of officers visible, available and able to respond or intervene. (Note: This proportion is less on Friday evenings than on Mondays, and not all the 11 percent would be available on the street.)

It will also require better pace and focus of partnership efforts to deal, for example, with wayward tenants, and shops selling alcohol, knives and spray paint<sup>21</sup>.

Most importantly, individuals and communities must mobilise their defences by re-establishing acceptable rules of behaviour for those in public spaces or impacting on their neighbours, for example, youths who congregate in town centre streets on Friday evening; drunks who habitually urinate in shop doorways; aggressive driving in residential streets. To some degree, the police and other agencies and partners

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<sup>21</sup> "Better regulation of age restricted products: a retail view" Aug 2010

can help with this, but the approach must involve doing it with the people on the receiving end of this behaviour.

If these issues matter then reports of ASB should count and be counted. The public are entitled to accessible, clear and easy to find information on the level and nature of ASB in their communities. Forces should have confidence in their data; those that do not should do something about it. Whilst the vast majority of forces publish ASB data monthly as part of the “crime mapping” application, a few forces<sup>22</sup> succeed in publishing the data on a regular and user-friendly basis, and should be commended for doing so. Their efforts show that there is little weight in any excuse that it is costly or difficult to do.

The big advantage is that by presenting crime and ASB data, police force performance reporting will be more like the real world that people see and experience everyday.

In summary, what works, what does not and what’s to be done for the public who are subject to ASB?

What works?

- Identifying repeat and vulnerable victims
- Attending and taking any timely action
- Briefing appropriate staff on the nature and impact of problems
- Understanding and analysing the problems

What does not?

- Being treated as low priority when making a call
- Long-term “partnership” solutions to problems that are causing harm now

What’s to be done?

- Publish accessible and comparable data on ASB
- Review Graded Response – especially where systems do not readily identify repeat callers
- Urgently review outcomes being achieved by CSPs for victims and the timeliness in which they act
- Focus on what works and what doesn’t
- Take account of the impact of slow or no action
- Early Intervention – focus on repeats

Aim – Recovering Neighbourhoods

Figure 8

Confronted by spending cuts, some police chiefs and Community Safety Partnership members may be tempted to reduce the amount of work they do in relation to ASB and to concentrate instead upon volume crime. All the evidence we have available indicates that this would be a very significant mistake. Managing ASB is crucial to sustaining the vitality and confidence of communities. Untreated ASB acts like a magnet for other crime and disorder problems and areas can quite easily tip into a spiral of economic and social decline.

<sup>22</sup> In particular, Hampshire, Merseyside, North Wales, West Midlands and West Yorkshire as of 10.08.10 HMIC

There is a huge potential pay-off from an early intervention strategy to restore peace to our streets and to impact on criminality, but it cannot be cost free. This is not to say that new investment is needed, but rather there must be a refocusing, funding that which works for victims. Dealing with the greatest harms could offer a way forward. Realistically it will depend at least partly on the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010.

There is no easy or cheap solution to ASB. But we are now at a point in time where we can make an informed choice.

HMIC  
Sept 2010.

Appendix A.

Categories	2008/9		2009/10	
	No. Incidents	% of total	No. Incidents	% of total
<b>Abandoned Vehicles</b> (not stolen or causing an obstruction)	128,205	4%	115,999	3%
<b>Animal Problems</b> (eg uncontrolled dogs – barking fouling footpaths)	67,740	2%	73,945	2%
<b>Begging / Vagrancy</b> (sleeping in open air – begging)	25,580	1%	24,159	1%
<b>Hoax Calls To Emergency Services</b> (calls that convey false information)	135,491	4%	137,729	4%
<b>Inappropriate Use / Sale / Possession Of Fireworks</b>	22,556	1%	19,602	1%
<b>Malicious Communications</b> (nasty phone calls – e-mails – nuisance calls)	199,398	5%	206,385	6%
<b>Noise</b> (Industry – pubs/clubs – raves)	68,782	2%	88,392	3%
<b>Prostitution Related Activity</b> (loitering)	5,795	0%	6,219	0%
<b>Rowdy / Nuisance - Environmental Damage / Littering</b>	24,729	1%	21,016	1%
<b>Rowdy / Nuisance – Neighbours</b> (nuisance between neighbours)	266,057	7%	286,651	8%
<b>Rowdy / Nuisance - Rowdy or Inconsiderate Behaviour</b> (Anything that does not amount to S4/5POA)	2,232,717	61%	2,138,530	61%
<b>Street Drinking</b> (Breaches of designated public areas – outside on licensed premises)	57,921	2%	48,571	1%
<b>Solvent Misuse</b> (removed from list for 2009/10)	40,944	1%		
<b>Trespass</b> (entering land without authority)	19,226	1%	20,169	1%
<b>Vehicle Nuisance / Inappropriate Vehicle Use</b> (vehicles repaired on highway – nuisance parking etc)	366,357	10%	344,930	10%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3,661,498</b>		<b>3,532,297</b>	

Please note - this data is not validated and as such should only be used for indicative purposes. This does not constitute recorded crime and there have been differences as to how forces interpret categories.

