

Anti-Social Behaviour Incident Types and Definitions introduced in April 2011

The guidance and definitions shown below have been taken from Chapter 2.2: Anti-Social Behaviour in the National Standard for Incident Recording 2011 documentation, which is available in full on the Home Office website at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/count-nsir11?view=Binary>

Definitions

ASB: PERSONAL

'Personal' is designed to identify ASB incidents that the caller, call-handler or anyone else perceives as either deliberately targeted at an individual or group or having an impact on an individual or group rather than the community at large.

It includes incidents that cause concern, stress, disquiet and/or irritation through to incidents which have a serious adverse impact on people's quality of life.

At one extreme of the spectrum it includes minor annoyance; at the other end it could result in risk of harm, deterioration of health and disruption of mental or emotional well-being, resulting in an inability to carry out normal day to day activities through fear and intimidation.

ASB: NUISANCE

'Nuisance' captures those incidents where an act, condition, thing or person causes trouble, annoyance, inconvenience, offence or suffering to the local community in general rather than to individual victims.

It includes incidents where behaviour goes beyond the conventional bounds of acceptability and interferes with public interests including health, safety and quality of life.

Just as individuals will have differing expectations and levels of tolerance so will communities have different ideas about what goes beyond tolerable or acceptable behaviour.

ASB: ENVIRONMENTAL

'Environmental' deals with the interface between people and places. It includes incidents where individuals and groups have an impact on their surroundings including natural, built and social environments.

This category is about encouraging reasonable behaviour whilst managing and protecting the various environments so that people can enjoy their own private spaces as well as shared or public spaces.

People's physical settings and surroundings are known to impact positively or negatively on mood and sense of well-being and a perception that nobody cares about the quality of a particular environment can cause those affected by that environment to feel undervalued or ignored.

Public spaces change over time as a result of physical effects caused, for example, by building but the environment can also change as a result of the people using or misusing that space.

Background

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) was defined in the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) 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 perpetrator.'

This definition included low level public order offences and other offences which are notifiable crimes and therefore beyond the remit of NSIR.

A more appropriate definition of ASB for NSIR is provided by the Housing Act (1996): 'Engaging in or threatening to engage in conduct causing or likely to cause a nuisance or annoyance to persons engaged in lawful activities'.

A further supportive definition of ASB was provided by the Chartered Institute of Housing (1995): 'Behaviour that unreasonably interferes with other people's rights to the use and enjoyment of their home and community'.

ASB therefore includes a variety of behaviour covering a whole complex of selfish and unacceptable activity that can blight the quality of life of a particular individual, group or community.

For the past 5 years the police have been using the 14 categories of ASB as defined by NSIR for dealing with incidents that fall short of being notifiable crimes. Whilst these categories provided a suitable data set for recording ASB they did not encourage call handlers to consider the risk involved for the caller, other individuals or the community as a whole if the ASB continued.

ASB in NSIR 2011 reflects a case management ethos rather than an incident based approach. It considers the spectrum of harm, encourages the management of risk and emphasises problem-solving. It simplifies and rationalises police activity in every aspect from recording, investigating, risk assessing and analysing through intervening and on to follow-up action. Further guidance is available in the Home Office Effective ASB Case Management Principles published in September 2010.

The proposed simplified categories change the emphasis from merely recording and responding to incidents to identifying those vulnerable individuals, communities and environments most at risk and therefore in need of a response before the problems escalate.

Failure to recognise the signs can result in the incidents becoming more violent or the ASB continuing and causing feelings of helplessness and depression which, as recent cases have shown, can result in tragic consequences.

As the emphasis has changed from categorising incidents to identifying vulnerability it is clear that the old ASB categories cannot be mapped up to the new categories: e.g. fireworks could be set off to the annoyance of the community in general or they could be targeted at a particular household.

The new categories do not preclude the need to check whether the caller has made contact before or if there have been other complaints from the location about similar or other issues.

The three proposed new ASB categories are:

- (1) Personal
- (2) Nuisance
- (3) Environmental

To match these three categories call-handlers at the first point of contact must have risk identification and assessment as a key part of their thinking and questioning process as none of the three categories is linked to a specific response grading.

There will be occasions where an immediate response to an ASB incident is appropriate but there will also be occasions where a slower response is more suitable. The onus is on the call-handler to ensure the correct initial response and for them to record their rationale.

There is a simple model consisting of three questions which will support the consideration of risk process:

- (1)What can go wrong?
- (2) How likely is it?
- (3)What are the consequences?

Effective risk management involves the identification, assessment and prioritisation of risks. It should lead to the appropriate use of resources to minimise, monitor and control the probability and/or impact of ASB.