

New National Approach to the Recording of Anti Social Behaviour Incidents by Police Forces

Background

The Home Office is introducing a change to the existing national guidance on how police forces record anti social behaviour incidents on their command & control systems. The purpose of the change is to focus more on the needs of the caller rather than the existing approach which centres more on categorising the type of anti social behaviour being reported. Ultimately, the objective is that vulnerable persons or those who have made repeated reports of ASB are more readily identified on police systems, therefore enabling the most appropriate police response to be provided. This change is to be introduced on 1st April 2011 and applies to all police forces in England & Wales. As the PSNI has adopted the Home Office National Standard for Incident Recording (NSIR), it was agreed at a recent PSNI senior management meeting (Chief Constables Forum dated 17th Nov 2010) that this change will be introduced within PSNI from 1st April 2011.

Official Statistics: User Consultation

In accordance with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, the PSNI is required to inform key users of any impending changes to our processes that could affect existing statistics. This proposed change would affect the PSNI's ASB statistics which, after the change on 1st April 2011, will no longer be directly comparable.

Methodology

All police forces use command & control systems to record calls for service from the public and to monitor ongoing police activity. The PSNI records around 1,500 incidents per day on its command & control system which equates to around 500,000 per annum. Around 20% of these incidents relate to crimes while the other 80% relate to non criminal incidents or reports of ongoing police activity. In order to get a better understanding of this non-crime activity, the Home Office introduced the NSIR in April 2006, whereby all police forces in England & Wales recorded incidents in a consistent manner. All police forces adopted the same set of closing codes used to describe various incident types along with agreed definitions for each.

The incident types covered in the NSIR covered 4 main groups:

1. Transport
2. Anti-Social Behaviour
3. Public, Safety and Welfare
4. Crime

Anti social behaviour is widely viewed as covering both criminal and non-criminal activity. However within the definitions provided by NSIR, ASB covers incidents of non-criminal activity only. Any incident of criminal activity that may be viewed as ASB is measured within the recorded crime figures.

Existing ASB Types

- 1) Abandoned vehicles
- 2) Animal problems
- 3) Begging
- 4) Hoax calls to the emergency services
- 5) Inappropriate use of fireworks
- 6) Malicious communications
- 7) Noise
- 8) Prostitution related activity
- 9) Littering/drugs paraphernalia
- 10) Nuisance neighbours
- 11) Rowdy nuisance behaviour
- 12) Street drinking
- 13) Trespass
- 14) Vehicle nuisance

New ASB Types

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

The current ASB section within the NSIR comprises some fourteen incident types (i.e. closing codes) and these have been adopted as PSNI's official measure of ASB since the introduction of NSIR in April 2006. The main criticism of the existing approach to ASB is that it does not encourage call handlers to consider the risk to the caller. The proposal for 1st April 2011 onwards is that the existing fourteen codes for ASB are reduced to three. In doing so the focus will be on how the ASB incident being reported impacts on the caller with emphasis placed on identifying vulnerable individuals, communities and environments most at risk.

New ASB Definitions (currently in draft awaiting final agreement by Home Office)

1) 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.

2. 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.

3. 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 effected 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.

Reasoning behind the change

As mentioned above, the focus of the new approach is more oriented towards the caller rather than the production of statistics on ASB incidents. With a number of recent high profile incidents that were a result of victims being subjected to repeated incidents of ASB, the Home Office was keen to ensure that the chances of this happening again are minimised. Hence the focus is on how ASB impacts the person and the 3 new closing codes are designed to help the call handler go through the correct thought process in order to ensure the effective risk management of each report of ASB. The onus is on the call handler to ensure that the correct initial response is taken and to record their rationale for their decisions.

The new Home Office approach to recording ASB incidents reflects a case management ethos of encouraging call handlers to consider the spectrum of harm associated with each incident. It also encourages the management of risk, emphasises problem solving and is closely linked to the Home Office's recently published guidance on 'Effective ASB Case Management Principles' (September 2010).

Impact on Comparability of ASB statistics

From 1st April 2011 ASB statistics will no longer be directly comparable with those published prior to this date. Firstly, one of the existing ASB incident types (Hoax calls to the emergency services) will be moved out of the ASB category and into the category of Public Safety & Welfare. Secondly, the

change from the current ASB incident types to three incident types with new definitions needs to be taken into account. An incident that might currently be recorded as ASB might be recorded under one of the remaining NSIR categories when the new definitions are applied. The converse may also happen where an incident that is currently recorded under a different category is regarded by the call handler as ASB when applying the new approach. As a result, there may well be a change in the level of ASB incidents recorded.

Conclusion

The PSNI's senior management considered the Home Office proposed change at their November meeting of the Chief Constable's Forum and agreed that PSNI would adopt the change from 1st April 2011. The main implication of the change is that the current existing definition of ASB based on 14 closing codes will be replaced by a new definition based on 3 closing codes which will describe the impact of ASB on the caller rather than focusing on the ASB behaviour type. As a result of the new definition, the existing statistics on ASB will not be directly comparable with statistics produced from 1st April 2011. Figures produced from this date will be monitored with a view to establishing a baseline for future comparison. However, it is stressed that the new codes are not designed to provide accurate or meaningful statistics on ASB but instead are aimed at ensuring that the needs of the caller are quickly and accurately determined on a case by case basis so that the police respond in the most appropriate manner.

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