

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Peter Barry Chief Officer Housing and Employability

Council: 22 December 2021

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**Subject: Anti-social Behaviour Service – Motion from Council 29 September 2021**

**1. Purpose**

**1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Council on the current Anti Social Behaviour Service in response to the Council motion raised at the Housing and Committee on 29 September 2021.

**2. Recommendations**

**2.1** Council is asked to note content of this report

**3. Background**

**3.1** This paper is written in response to the Council Motion raised by Councillor David McBride on 29 September 2021 in relation to the Anti Social Behaviour Service.

“This Council is concerned that although the anti-social behaviour budget has been cut, the numbers of cases continue to increase.

The Council notes that in 2017/18 the anti-social behaviour budget was **£719,000** and there were **312** anti-social behaviour cases during the year.

However by 2020/21 the budget reduced to **£398,000** and the number of anti-social behaviour cases had increased to **978**.

The 2021/22 budget increased slightly to **£446,000** but before the mid-year point, the number of anti-social behaviour cases had reached **511** which suggest that the total instances could exceed **1,000** by the end of the financial year.

Council also notes that staff reductions now means the Council only operates with a maximum of 3 anti-social behaviour officers on duty each day and the service ends at 02:00.

In addition the number of mediation referrals has also steadily reduced from **93** in 2017, **71** in 2018, **41** in 2019, and to **13** in 2020/21 when the service

was suspended due to COVID. There have been no referrals during the current financial year 2021/22.

Given the above, the Council calls on the Chief Executive to bring forward a report to a future Council meeting setting out the details of the anti-social behaviour service including staffing levels, case work and operational arrangements across the our Council area.

Addendum accepted:–

Council asks officers to arrange an elected member seminar to allow Councillors to ask detailed questions about this service area and to help officers determine areas of particular interest or concern to Councillors in advance of preparing their report.”

**3.2** West Dunbartonshire Council restructured its Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) team in February 2020.

The previous service was resourced by six officers in the Anti Social Investigation and Support Team (ASIST), four ASB Environment and four Mediation Officers, totalling 14 FTEs across these three service areas. These teams operated Monday to Friday 8.30 – 16.45.

Following the restructure the new service provides 16 FTEs overall, which includes additional service provision through the new Neighbourhood Team. The ASB Service now includes eight Anti Social Behaviour Officers, two daytime and six Out of Hours. They operate on a “four on four off” shift pattern between the hours of 08.30 – 16.45 (dayshift) and 15.00 – 02.00 (backshift). This team is further complemented by a new Neighbourhood Team, which also consists of eight officers who operate between 13.00 – midnight and also on a “four on four off” shift pattern. The Neighbourhood Team compliment and support the work undertaken by our ASB service by providing visible community ASB patrols within our estates.

The restructure has increased our resources at night and on weekends. The service now provides seven officers working seven nights a week to 2am, across the authority to help tackle and address incidents of ASB. As a result, the new service is providing a more comprehensive, efficient and effective level of support for our communities. In particular the new approach provides the reassurance of both a day and night service, which is something the Council was previously not able to provide.

**3.3** Part of the motion included a request to provide an elected member briefing session in advance of committee to all allow members the opportunity to obtain further information and detail on the ABS service and performance. This session was held on 13 October 2021.

**4. Main Issues**

**4.1** COVID has had a significant impact on our ASB services due to Scottish Government lockdown restrictions and strict guidance around home working.

In line with every other Local Authority across the country, council officers had to quickly develop new working practices and comply with the guidance. As a result ASB services could not be delivered in the preferred community based way for an extended period. Inevitably and unavoidably this had an impact on service delivery.

However, throughout the pandemic our ASB team continued to manage complaints from home, ensuring that contact was made with all complainers and advice and assistance was given on incidents of ASB. This included liaising closely with our Police Scotland colleagues to ensure serious incidents of ASB were picked up. In line with easing of restrictions and Scottish Government guidance, the ASB team recommenced physical service delivery from June 2021, whilst adhering to safe working practices to ensure the safety of our staff and other parties involved.

This enhanced service provides crucial out of hours and weekend physical presence within our communities that the previous ASB service did not provide. Therefore this offers enhanced and additional support to our tenants and residents.

The role and remit of this team is to respond to complaints of ASB and progress cases until resolution. This can include legal intervention measures, issuing Fixed Penalty Notices, working jointly with Police Scotland colleagues and conducting visible community patrols within our estates, offering reassurance to our tenants and residents.

As part of our restructure the decision was taken to add conflict resolution to the skills of our eight ASB officers. Conflict resolution was identified as a quicker route to resolution for disputes between tenants/resident and our eight ASB officers have now been trained to deliver this. Notwithstanding, we still retain elements of our previous mediation service for in-house delivery.

All 16 Officers will report any incidents of ASB, liaise with Police Scotland to report any ongoing incidents witnessed in real time and act as a professional witness on behalf of our tenants/residents at court should this need arise.

The ability for our team to act as professional witnesses at court offers much needed reassurance and support to our tenants/residents who have experienced ASB. It provides support in terms of any anxieties or concerns they may have with regards to giving evidence or potential repercussions from perpetrators from reporting ASB.

**4.2** In addition to our ASB Services the team also deliver No Home for Domestic Abuse (NHDA) to all residents in West Dunbartonshire.

The aim of this service is to ensure victims have immediate access to practical help and specialist legal assistance and support following any incident of

domestic abuse. In addition the local authority will use the full scope of Anti-Social Behaviour powers in conjunction with Housing and Matrimonial Homes. Legislation to ensure victims can remain at home, whilst the perpetrator will be legally removed, and prevented from returning.

Since inception of this service on 1 June 2018, NHDA has dealt with 355 cases ranging from advice and assistance, relocation for personal safety, lock changes/security upgrades, and financial help. 11 offenders have been moved from the matrimonial home.

The service participates in Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences and is firmly rooted within this multi agency partnership to support victims of Domestic abuse.

- 4.3** During the recent past there has been a spike in the number of ASB complaints received, resulting in 978 cases being reported to us throughout the pandemic. It is believed the likely cause of this trend is due to all residents being asked to remain at the home during lockdown periods, which may have put additional pressures within individual homes and relationships with neighbours resulting in an increase in ASB incidents.




The service experienced a 60% increase in calls though lockdown and differing Tier restrictions.



However, a key factor contributing to the increase in ASB statistics was the Scottish Government change to the definition of “case” from 2019/20 onwards. This change meant that we require to record all calls as cases, which has been a factor in increased numbers recorded, noted below.

Year	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22(ytd)
<b>Case Numbers</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>611</b>	<b>978</b>	<b>511</b>

Recent spikes in cases are related to the collective experience of the pandemic, and also the new definition of an ASB case outlined above. This will be kept under review in an effort to provide the most effective response and address the additional volume of cases.

Further detail is noted below in terms of our ASB service performance.

<b>Estate management, anti-social behaviour</b>							
Indicator	2019/20 value	2020/21 Value	2020/21 target	Status	Trend	Q1 2021/22	Q2 2021/22
% of tenants satisfied with landlord’s contribution to management of neighbourhood	78.53%	78.53%	85%				
% of ASB cases reported which were resolved	94.74%	92.83%	95%			60.5%	89.2%

Overall satisfaction with the Anti-social Behaviour Service	53.7%	96.8%	77%			100%	95%
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\*% tenants satisfied with landlord's contribution to management of neighbourhood – figure source via tenant satisfaction survey.

**4.4** The ASB and Neighbourhood Teams aim to provide a visible, proactive service that works collaboratively with Police Scotland and other partners, facilitating safer communities throughout West Dunbartonshire.

All stakeholders can make a positive contribution to reducing the blight of ASB in terms of reporting incidents, challenging negative behaviours, and providing information guidance and support.

A critical message we provide to our communities is that the responsibility to manage anti social behaviours always starts with the individual and that each person has the responsibility to act in an acceptable manner, ensuring that they show respect for others.

It is recognised, however, that not all individuals will conduct themselves in an acceptable manner, and our ASB team are committed to taking robust and effective action based on available evidence. A key element of our approach is found in our work with perpetrators involved in ASB to help support them to address their unacceptable behaviour and support change. In cases where individuals do not comply we will use all available ASB measures to address the situation.

**4.5** Part of the future development of the ASB service and work towards our Charter Improvement Plan is a review of our ASB Strategy. This work has been significantly delayed due to the impact of Covid-19. Work is now underway, and there will be a period of consultation once this is in draft format.

**4.6** As part of our continuous improvement agenda, we have also committed to review our internal processes, procedures, recording and reporting functions as part of a “walk the process” for this service area. Initial scoping discussions have been undertaken with key staff involved in the process and we will be looking to proceed with a short life working group to identify areas of improvement.

**4.7** During the member briefing session on 13 October 2021, a request was made to provide comparable ASB performance data. Officers have obtained peer grouping Local Authority data which is provided below. However, caution should be noted with this data as it is extremely difficult draw any meaningful comparable data on this subject due to a range of varying factors, such as team structure, resources, remit, service provision, and local polices.

<b>Peer LA Group</b>	<b>ASB Cases Reported 20/21</b>	<b>ASB Cases Resolved 20/21</b>	<b>% ASB Cases Resolved 20/21</b>
Dundee City Council	1946	1561	80.22
East Ayrshire Council	393	362	92.11
Falkirk Council	1194	1062	88.94
Highland Council	724	532	73.48
North Ayrshire Council	1198	994	82.97
Renfrewshire Council	478	477	99.79
<b>West Dunbartonshire Council</b>	<b>976</b>	<b>906</b>	<b>92.83</b>
West Lothian Council	310	270	87.1

## **5. People Implications**

**5.1** None.

## **6. Financial and Procurement Implications**

**6.1** In response to the Council Motion around reduction in the ASB budget, the following information can be provided.

The core ASB budget was £719,000 in 2017/18. Over the subsequent years this reduced to £398,000 in 2020/21. It then increased to £446,000 in 2021/22. Following a recurring variances accountancy exercise this was revised to £439,000. Not all the reductions in budget led to reductions in service and in some instances the budget was transferred to another service or reduced because costs were picked up by other budget lines.

There are various factors influencing budget changes summarised below.

- 2017/18 to 2018/19 - one ASB post being removed and £60,000 payment to Police Scotland for out of hours noise response ceased.
- 2018/19 to 2019/20 - restructure of ASB/caretaking staff, which included the appropriate movement of staff costs to the HRA account.
- 2020/21 – budget of £71,000 for two litter cleaning staff, and £23,000 dog fouling bags were transferred from ASB budget to ground maintenance/street cleaning budget.
- 2021/22 – there is currently around £130,000 of ASB costs within the HRA due to staff managing cases involving WDC tenants, which is in addition to the £439,000 budget allocation for this financial year.

Therefore the net council spend on ASB and related services has changed from £719,000 to £663,000

## **7. Risk Analysis**

- 7.1** There are potential risks associated as part of this service in relation to Covid and also potential health and safety risks when dealing with ASB incidents. However, it is recognised that a key element of the ASB service and being able to robustly address incidents of ASB is the ability to deliver and respond to incidents of ASB in person, which will involve a range of staff and individuals from the community.

In order to reduce any potential risks to parties we have a range of measures in place, detailed below –

Risk Assessments – these are continually reviewed and updated to ensure robust measures in place and staff are involved in regular review of these.

ASB procedures and processes, which include training for staff and clear guidance on health and safety matters, including an alert marker process for any perpetrator of ASB.

Strong joint working relationships with our Police Scotland colleagues to ensure that any incidents of ASB are responded to timeously.

Senior management representation at the Safe DIG, which is a multi agency forum to discuss and plan strategic and operational responses to ASB and community safety issues.

## **8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)**

- 8.1** As part of our review of the ASB Strategy we have commenced completing a new EIA, this will be available for view in line with the completion of our new ASB strategy, which is scheduled for completion by 31 March 2022.

## **9 Consultation**

- 9.1** As part of the review of the ASB Strategy, we will be carrying out consultation on the contents of this with key stakeholders, elected members and the West Dunbartonshire Tenants & Residents Organisation. As outlined previously we will also be taking the proposed ASB Strategy to the Safe DIG to ensure that we have input from wider key partners in terms of addressing community safety.

## **10. Strategic Assessment**

- 10.1** The proposals within this report are in clear alignment with the Council's strategic priorities in particular with reference to community empowerment and creating attractive, sustainable communities that people want to live in.

**Peter Barry**

Chief Officer, Housing and Employability

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**Person to Contact:** Nicola Pettigrew, Housing Operations Manager  
Tel. 07823 520 493

**Appendices:** None

**Background Papers:** None

**Wards Affected:** All Council Wards