

Social Behaviour Strategy

Preventing & Reducing Anti Social Behaviour

DRAFT



Introduction

The Social Behaviour Strategy forms part of the three-year SaferMK Plan produced by the Milton Keynes Community Safety Partnership. It presents our vision as a partnership for a strong and cohesive community in which people support one another and promote a high quality of life. We believe that Milton Keynes is already an excellent place in which to live and work and we wish to maintain this and improve it even further.

We know that a small minority of people are disruptive to others and cause harm to the social fabric of our community. Our strategy is to deal vigorously with anti-social behaviour while strongly promoting the kind of positive activities that do so much to bind our communities together. We believe that the “social” elements in Milton Keynes are ultimately much more powerful than the “anti-social” ones. This strategy demonstrates how we shall develop positive activities and minimise negative ones in order to make Milton Keynes an even better place to live.

Definitions

Our approach to promoting social behaviour is relatively new and there is no national definition. In contrast much has been written about anti-social behaviour during the last 15 years and there are several definitions in current usage.

A working definition of **social behaviour** is *any activity by an individual or group that helps to build a community or neighbourhood in which people support one another and have particular regard to those most in need*. Most social behaviour is unconscious as people engage in it all the time, often without realising it.

Our working definition of **anti-social behaviour** is therefore *any activity by an individual or group that undermines a community or neighbourhood and causes harm to individuals, including those most in need*. However many other definitions of anti-social behaviour are currently used across the U.K. The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 defines anti-social behaviour as *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 is the definition that must be used, for practical purposes, when dealing with the judicial process.

Whatever the definition it is certain that anti-social behaviour includes criminal activity as well as behaviour that is destructive to neighbourhoods but does not actually break the law. Anti-social behaviour can also be unconscious and it is therefore important that it is challenged appropriately by the community. However it can be difficult and even dangerous for individuals to challenge anti-social behaviour and this strategy is intended to provide communities with ways of doing so.

Above all the strategy aims to promote neighbourhoods in which social behaviour is recognised and valued by all members of the community.

Aims and objectives

The strategic aims are to:

1. promote and develop neighbourhoods in which people value one another and support those most in need.
2. reduce anti-social behaviour through prevention, enforcement and promoting stronger communities.

Objectives are to:

- promote social behaviour in schools and communities, publicly recognising outstanding initiatives that support and build up the community.
- develop “community champions”; volunteers who are willing to work with police and local councils in order to resolve community problems.
- develop localised community action plans to promote social behaviour and tackle anti-social behaviour in areas of need.
- promote and utilise community mediation in order to resolve tensions at an early stage.
- offer high quality support to victims and witnesses of anti-social behaviour.
- ensure that anti-social behaviour is resolved vigorously through community liaison, prevention and, where necessary, enforcement.

Key targets are to:

- increase the perception that people in Milton Keynes treat one another with respect and demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours in their communities.
- reduce anti-social behaviour as reported to Thames Valley Police and Milton Keynes Council. The reduction target will be fixed annually and it will be challenging.

The national and local context

National Context

A primary focus of all governments in recent years has been to tackle anti-social behaviour. In fact, every local authority and police service is required to produce a policy on tackling anti-social behaviour. Until recently there has been little emphasis on promoting social behaviour in communities.

The Localism Act received royal assent on 15th November 2011 and this represented a major step forward in government policy, enabling local communities to take greater responsibility for the things that concern them most. It also gives powers and responsibilities to local authorities to ensure that neighbourhoods are strengthened. Although the term “social behaviour” is not used in the legislation many of the features of this strategy have been anticipated in the Localism Act.

During the last twenty years the term “anti-social behaviour” has become part of national currency. As stated above it is notoriously difficult to define, but the misery it can cause has struck a chord with the general public. The press and television have backed this up with a series of tragic stories that illustrate the harm that has occurred to individuals as a result of anti-social behaviour.

The last government responded with a number of high-profile measures including Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and Dispersal Orders. The current government produced a white paper in May 2012, “*Putting Victims First*”, that is designed to be victim and community centred in its approach while reducing and simplifying the number of enforcement measures that can be taken. ASBOs will be abolished and it is proposed that the following six measures will be sufficient to allow robust and effective response to anti-social behaviour:

- **Crime Prevention Injunctions.** Orders through civil Courts that can be applied quickly. They prevent the person from engaging in specified anti-social or criminal activities. A breach is a criminal offence.
- **Criminal Behaviour Orders.** These may be applied following conviction in a Court. They work in the same way as the injunctions.
- **Community Protection Notice.** These can be issued to businesses or other organisations to tackle specific problems – e.g. litter or graffiti.
- **Community Protection Order (public space).** These can be applied for by local authorities and stipulate behaviour that is not permitted in certain public spaces, e.g. dog fouling or skateboarding in parks.

- **Community Protection Order (closure).** These allow police or local authorities to apply for the temporary closure of any premises where crime or anti-social behaviour is a persistent problem.
- **Directions Power.** This permits a police officer to order an individual to leave a particular place for up to 48 hours in order to prevent anti-social behaviour.

These measures are likely to be modified as the white paper becomes a Bill and progresses through Parliament, but it demonstrates the seriousness with which anti-social behaviour is taken by the government.

Local context

In Milton Keynes reported anti-social behaviour has fallen by 20% during the last three years. However that should not be a cause of complacency. The SaferMK Partnership believes that the way forward is to promote social behaviour, as outlined above. This will ensure that the reductions in anti-social behaviour can be sustained during the next few years. It will also help to build and sustain a community of which we can be proud.

As stated above, every local authority and police service has a policy on reducing anti-social behaviour. This strategy advocates a new approach that may be unique at the time of writing. The delivery plan below demonstrates how we intend to promote social behaviour within our community.

Delivery Plan

Figure One displays the actions that will be taken in order to deliver the social behaviour strategy. The strategy will be led by the Milton Keynes Council Neighbourhood Teams with the full support of partner teams and agencies.

Our focus will primarily be on the matters that were highlighted in the Strategic Assessment 2011. These include:

- Issues that cause most concern to local neighbourhoods: noise, criminal damage, graffiti, parking and dog nuisance.
- The need for tolerance and equality when dealing with minority communities.
- The need for children and young people to play and interact safely and appropriately in the community
- Neighbour disputes which become acute if they are not resolved quickly.

Education and Good Neighbour events

The first stage will be to develop a programme of education about social behaviour in local schools and communities. In conjunction with Town and Parish Councils, Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs) and other local bodies the neighbourhood teams will organise a series of “good neighbour” events in the community. This will include recognition and possibly awards for initiatives that successfully promote social behaviour in the community. Particular interest will be shown in any initiatives that help to prevent or tackle the problems of greatest concern to the community (listed above). We will encourage use of press briefings and publication in parish magazines.

Information

It is vital that communities receive the information they need to enable them to deliver all aspects of the strategy. This is the essence of the government’s “transparency” agenda. We will therefore provide full details of the nature and progress of the community, including the following:

- Demographic details, including population size, age groups, ethnicity and religion.
- Local initiatives that are taking place to promote social behaviour.
- Crime and anti-social behaviour levels and trends

As we provide this information we will invite feedback from the community.

Community champions

As mentioned above, community champions will be volunteers who work with police and local councils to promote social behaviour and resolve neighbourhood issues and tensions. They may be based in Neighbourhood Action Groups as well as within other community groups such as Junior Rangers or residents’ associations. Champions will be drawn from all sections of the community including young people. We will encourage, support and develop the work of champions as a key part of our strategy.

Community Action Planning

The police and council neighbourhood teams will work with local partners, as listed above, to establish community action plans (CAPs) which will address major sources of tension that have been identified within each locality. When writing a CAP it is essential first to conduct full scale research into the situation and define the underlying problem. The CAP will then define how the problem is to be resolved, allocating responsibilities to the various agencies and community members.

Referring and assessing anti-social behaviour

Wherever possible we will resolve anti-social behaviour by visiting all parties to the complaint as rapidly as possible and securing agreement. In many cases the problem can be as much due to differences of perception as it is to deliberate destructive behaviour. Initial visits can be made by a variety of agencies including:

- Thames Valley Police
- Milton Keynes Council (Regulatory Unit and Housing Department)
- Registered Social Landlords

Referrals of anti-social behaviour may be made directly to Thames Valley Police or Milton Keynes Council and we will ensure that all agencies work together to resolve the problem. Our first step will be to make a risk assessment. Most situations present as low or medium risk and we are able to take the steps described below. High risk cases will involve immediate enforcement action as described below, but these situations represent a low proportion of our referrals.

Mediation

In low and many medium risk cases the next step would be to refer the situation for mediation, provided the parties to the dispute agree. Milton Keynes has an independent Community Mediation Service which is available to all members of the public. It has a track record of bringing people together and enabling them to resolve their own disputes before they fester. The earlier mediation is applied in a situation the greater the chance of success.

Warnings and joint action

In the relatively few cases when these courses of action do not resolve the situation we have a variety of methods that we can adopt. Warning letters often prove effective, and this is often coupled with joint action from a number of agencies in order to prevent further anti-social behaviour (for instance police may co-operate with MKC housing or environmental health officers). Action is directed to resolving the problem through a combination of prevention, victim support and enforcement methods.

Victim support

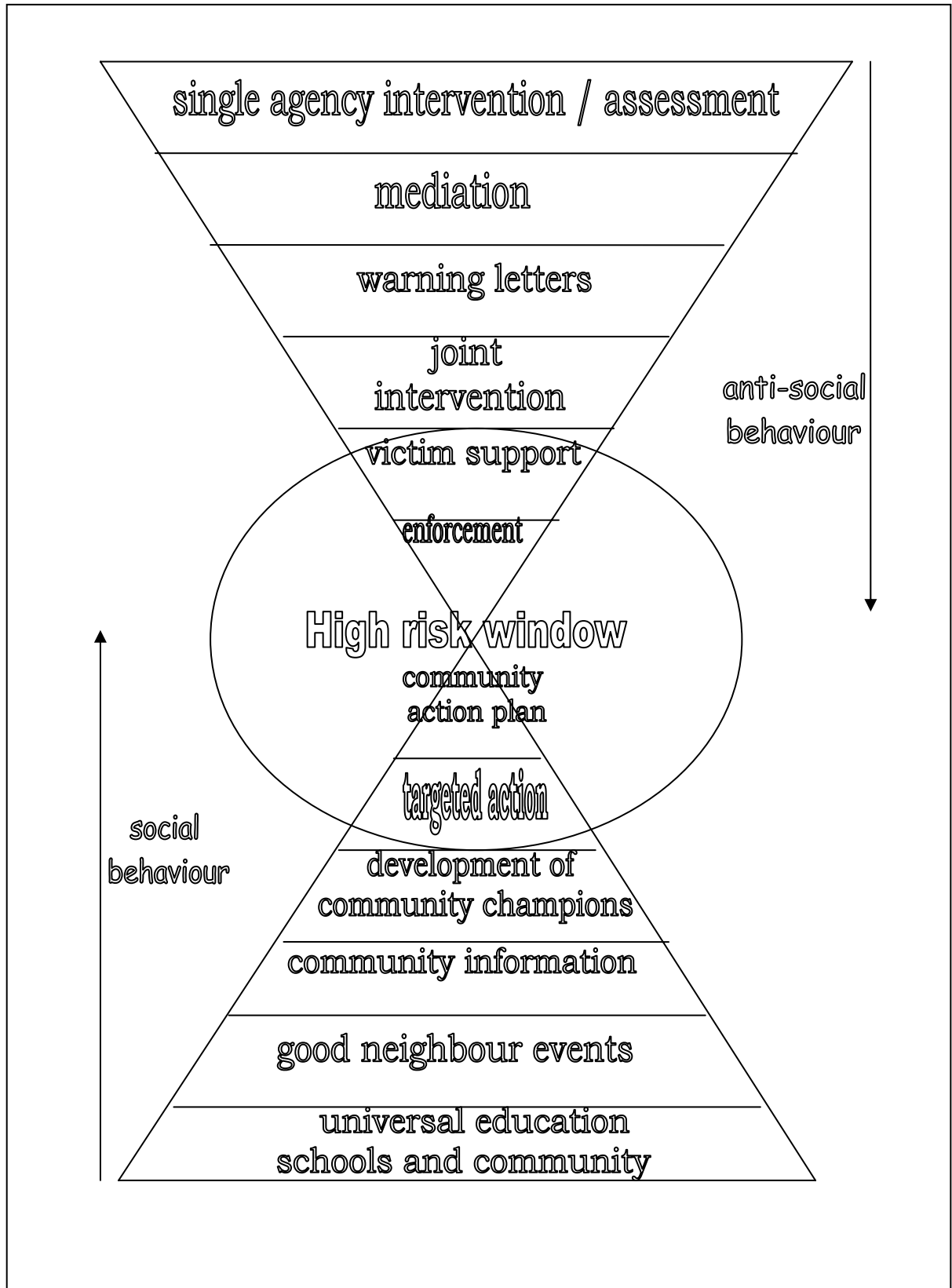
In high risk situations we will ensure that a multi-agency action plan is carried out to prevent further anti-social behaviour and to support the victims. High quality support of victims and witnesses is essential throughout this process and this will be included as an integral part of intervention plans. In addition victims of high risk situations will be offered counselling should they wish to take it up.

Enforcement

In the small proportion of cases that cannot be resolved by other means enforcement action is necessary. This may include the use of voluntary acceptable behaviour contracts (ABCs) or court action.

There are a variety of different Orders and measures as outlined under “local and national context” above. The multi-agency Cases Panel meets monthly to determine the best course of action in each situation.

The Social Behaviour Delivery Plan 2012-15



Next steps

The social behaviour delivery group will produce specific actions for 2012-15. These will form part of the strategy and will ensure that the Delivery Plan above is implemented to a high standard.

The delivery group consists of all partner agencies and is led by the Assistant Director for Environmental Services in Milton Keynes Council. The strategy will form part of the three-year SaferMK Plan and it will be reviewed annually in the light of evidence, including feedback from the public

Conclusion

The aim of the strategy is to promote social behaviour within the community. We will encourage community members to take a greater part in assisting to build neighbourhoods in which people work together in harmony and in which they can take pride.

In doing so the reductions in anti-social behaviour that we have seen over the last few years will be sustained and we will ensure, as far as possible, that enforcement action is unnecessary. However where there is a risk that anti-social behaviour will continue we will take every measure necessary to ensure that the problem is resolved.

We are confident that it will do much to promote Milton Keynes as a pleasant and safe environment in which to live, visit and work.