

Health and Adult Social Care and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Anti-social Behaviour in Cheshire East Task and Finish Group

September 2017 – September 2018

1. Chairman's Foreword

- 1.1. Anti-social behaviour is an area of great concern that affects people in many parts of the world, and Cheshire East is no exception to this. The term anti-social behaviour covers a wide range of behaviours and activities, of differing impacts and severity to its victims.
- 1.2. Anti-social behaviour can have negative impacts on the emotional, physical and mental health and wellbeing of its victims. If it is not addressed or dealt with in a timely or effective manner, it can also detrimentally affect community spirit and cohesion on a wider level.
- 1.3. Dealing with disruptive behaviour and its impacts on our residents is essential; however, services are having to be delivered and maintained in a challenging financial climate with growing pressure on public sector resources.
- 1.4. This review and report stemmed from the difficult decision made by Peaks and Plains Housing Trust – one of the largest social housing providers in the borough – to manage the financial and resources pressures it faced by making significant changes to its anti-social behaviour service provision.
- 1.5. In order that this piece of task and finish work be as focused and impactful as possible, we decided to concentrate our review on the important role that social housing providers have in preventing anti-social behaviour and supporting its victims, and how this important work both supports, and is carried out in partnership, with Cheshire East Borough Council, Cheshire Police and other crime and community disorder partners.
- 1.6. In making any recommendations, we have remained mindful of the pressures being experienced by this council and its partners, and have tried to ensure that they are workable and deliverable, and will ultimately lead to better outcomes for the residents of Cheshire East.
- 1.7. I would like to thank all of the people who have contributed to this review and the making of this report.



Councillor B Dooley,

Chairman of the Anti-social Behaviour Task
and Finish Group

2. Background and Membership

- 2.1. At its meeting on 25 April 2017, the committee was informed that Peaks and Plains Housing Trust (PPHT) had taken a business decision to remove the Neighbourhood and Anti-social Behaviour Unit. This was taken in response to the announcement in the Summer Budget 2015 that social housing rent costs were to be cut by 1 per cent each year for four years, beginning in April 2016.
- 2.2. The committee was motivated to undertake this review after being advised that the decision made by PPHT had placed a greater pressure on Cheshire East Borough Council (the council) and Cheshire Police services to deal with a greater caseload of low-level and high-level anti-social behaviour.
- 2.3. The task and finish group, as set out below, was established begun its work in September 2017.



Councillor B Dooley (Chairman)



Left to right: Councillors S Brookfield, S Edgar, G Merry and M Warren

3. Terms of Reference

Aim of the Review

- 3.1. To explore the impacts that the decision made by Peaks and Plains Housing Trust to reduce the provision of resources into its anti-social

behaviour function had on local residents, council services, and local crime and disorder partners such as Police and Fire and Rescue services.

Objectives

- 3.2. During this piece of work, the task and finish group determined that it would seek to develop a better understanding of;
- the different types of anti-social behaviour and their prevalence in Cheshire East;
 - the regulatory and legislative duties on social landlords to support tenants who experience anti-social behaviour and act to reduce the occurrence and seriousness of anti-social behaviour cases;
 - the impacts of resource pressure on the capacities and abilities of social housing providers and partners to effectively tackle anti-social behaviour in the borough; and
 - how partnership working and shared communication was being used to improve resource-efficiency and more effectively deal with cases of anti-social behaviour.
- 3.3. To submit workable recommendations to community safety partners in Cheshire East, to ensure that a holistic and sustainable approach to preventing and tackling anti-social behaviour can be maintained.

4. Methodology

4.1. Timeline of meetings

21 September 2017	The group members met to undertake the Initial review scope.
6 October 2017	The group convened to finalise the scope and methodology for the project.
16 January 2018	<p>The group members met to review a range of evidence submitted by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cheshire East Borough Council's Anti-social Behaviour Team Leader• Homechoice• Cheshire Police• Peaks and Plains Housing Trust• Guinness Partnership
2 February 2018	The group met with the Neighbourhood Services Leader for Guinness Partnership.

15 March 2018	The group met with two Tenancy Enforcement Officers for Plus Dane Housing Group.
23 April 2018	The group met with the Interim Customer Experience Team Leader and Assistant Customer Services Managers for Peaks and Plains Housing Trust.

At the meeting with PPHT, the group was advised that at the beginning of 2018, resources had been re-allocated to support an in-house anti-social behaviour function. Members agreed that some time would be given to review the situation and that it would meet at a later date to determine whether continued work on this review would be required.

27 September 2018	The task and finish group met to revisit the initial terms of reference for the review and determined that it would conclude its work, produce a final report including within this its recommendations.
22 November 2018	Task and finish group met to agree the final report.
6 December 2018	The report was presented to the Health and Adult Social Care and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee for approval.

5. Findings

- 5.1. The generally accepted definition of anti-behaviour is any activities or behaviours that can negatively impact an individual, their community or their environment. It can be action by another person that harasses or distresses, or the fear of crime or concern for public safety.
- 5.2. Information received from the Police, Peaks and Plains Housing Trust and Guinness Partnership revealed that the most frequently reported types of anti-social behaviour in Cheshire East were;
 - noise nuisance;
 - verbal abuse;
 - street drinking;
 - homelessness;
 - fly-tipping;
 - drug use, or drug-related issues;

- graffiti;
- dog fouling;
- littering; and
- youths loitering.

Legislative and Regulatory Duties

- 5.3. Since the late 1990s the government has created a framework of legislation designed to tackle anti-social behaviour, some of which is specific to social landlords, aimed at equipping them with greater powers to ensure the safety of their communities.
- 5.4. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998, for example, put a duty on responsible authorities to work together to tackle identified problems and reduce crime in their local area.
- 5.5. The Safer Cheshire East Partnership was formed in April 2009 as a result of the Local Government Review in Cheshire. Prior to its establishment, there were three Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships geographically based around the old borough boundaries of Congleton, Crewe and Nantwich, and Macclesfield.
- 5.6. The Safer Cheshire East Partnership Plan 2017-20 sets out the roles of each partner agency in supporting the delivery of the plan priorities to;
 - increase community awareness and intelligence, and focus resources based upon analysis;
 - understand the impact of service changes and add more focused value from service delivery; and
 - empower and enable communities to challenge issues that affect them.
- 5.7. The group strongly agreed with these priorities and felt that work should continue to encourage residents and communities in Cheshire East to take on their own personal, and collective, social responsibilities for behaving properly and appropriately, and empower them to challenge negative or anti-social behaviour.

How Anti-social Behaviour is Tackled

- 5.8. Members were aware that successfully preventing and tackling anti-social behaviour in Cheshire East would still require effective service delivery from the council and all of its crime and disorder partners, in addition to enabling communities.

- 5.9. There are a range of powers, tools and practice available to social landlords to support them to tackle and resolve anti-social behaviour, from early interventions and preventative action, through to enforcement and legal proceedings.
- 5.10. It has become common practice for social landlords to include behavioural requirements within tenancy contracts, or make use of introductory or starter tenancies.
- 5.11. These contracts, usually lasting for up to twelve months, provide housing associations with the opportunity to more quickly evict tenants that exhibit unacceptable or anti-social behaviour, before they obtain permanent tenancy contracts.
- 5.12. The group was advised that early intervention and prevention is the preferred method of handling anti-social behaviour, as cases can be prevented from becoming more serious and impactful, and high costs attached to enforcement or legal actions can be avoided.

Impacts of the Decision by Peaks and Plains Housing Trust

- 5.13. Following the decision made by PPHT, the committee was advised that it had begun to – in most cases – signpost and direct residents to the council and Cheshire Police when enquiring or complaining about anti-social behaviour.
- 5.14. Members heard that taking on an increased caseload had placed a greater pressure on these services to continue to sustainably deliver services that effectively handled anti-social behaviour cases and support victims.
- 5.15. The group was advised by PPHT that they had continued to deal with high-level cases of anti-social behaviour, particularly issues of vulnerability or criminal action, or those that affected its business. Some work in relation to lower-level anti-social behaviour cases had been outsourced to Weaver Vale Housing, but that no effective monitoring mechanism had been put in place.
- 5.16. The group felt that, based on the evidence received from local community safety partners and the sudden impact on these services once PPHT had removed its anti-social behaviour unit, it could have undertaken a more comprehensive consultation with partners further in advance of the decision that was made.
- 5.17. At the meeting on 23 April 2018, PPHT informed the group that from September 2017 it had stopped referring matters directly to the council, except for cases involving environmental health complaints, for example, noise pollution.

- 5.18. The group were made aware that, at the beginning of 2018, PPHT had reconsidered its previous decision and interim arrangements for dealing with anti-social behaviour and, as a result, had begun to reintroduce resources into providing an in-house anti-social behaviour function.
- 5.19. It was clear to the group that the impacts that arose from the decision by PPHT, could have been minimised or resolved, if it had not been made in isolation and sufficient consultation with community safety partners had been undertaken.
- 5.20. Statistics collated by the council's Anti-social Behaviour Team showed that there was approximately a 30 per cent reduction in the total number of recorded anti-social behaviour complaints relating to PPHT tenants between 2017 (January to December) and 2018 (January to present,) indicating that the reintroduction of an in-house anti-social behaviour function at PPHT has reduced the caseload and pressure on the council's service.

The Partnership Approach

- 5.21. Following continued resource pressures and financial constraints within the public sector, social housing organisations along with other community safety partners, had already begun to establish joint-working arrangements to make more efficient use of resources.
- 5.22. The Safer Cheshire East Partnership put a further emphasis on the importance of partnership working, particularly given that anti-social behaviour cases had become increasingly complex, and in some cases required multi-faceted support from a variety of service areas.
- 5.23. The group found, however, that not all registered social landlords in the borough had made equal efforts to engage in the partnership approach – be it through regular meetings with partners, shared communication protocols or joint working arrangements – and that this would need to be improved to secure sustainable service delivery for the future.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1. The task and finish group wanted to acknowledge within its report that its conclusions and recommendations are considerably different to what they would have been, had PPHT not reconsidered its prior decision and reintroduced resources to provide an in-house anti-social behaviour function.
- 6.2. While pleased that PPHT had begun to resource an in-house anti-social behaviour function again, members acknowledged that the findings from this review highlighted that changes and improvements had to be made in

order to minimise the impacts to residents following changes to community safety service delivery.

- 6.3. There has been a growing emphasis within Cheshire East on the need for Crime and disorder partners to develop and use multi-agency approaches to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour in a more holistic and sustainable way.
- 6.4. Cases of anti-social behaviour are becoming increasingly complex and as such, a multi-faceted approach between social housing landlords, police, social services and other partners is sometimes needed to secure the right outcomes for both victims and perpetrators.
- 6.5. Regardless of impact, it was clear to the group that PPHT should have consulted in more detail with partners and worked towards a shared agreement on how PPHT cases of anti-social behaviour would be dealt with once it ceased its in-house anti-social behaviour unit.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1. That this case be used as a learning exercise for all community safety partners in Cheshire East, and a reminder of the need for improved consultation and communication between local community safety partners regarding proposed changes to community safety service provision, to minimise the potential impacts to residents.
- 7.2. That community safety partners endeavour to set a clear precedent for consultation on such matters, as well as collective information sharing agreements, to further encourage the partnership approach to develop and become a more effective function.
- 7.3. That Peaks and Plains Housing Trust, Guinness Partnership and Plus Dane Housing be asked to provide further evidence to the council's Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee – the scrutiny body now responsible for community safety matters – to inform of current and future planned arrangements for how anti-social behaviour cases are dealt with, and performance in this area.
- 7.4. That the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee endeavour to be involved in the development and production of future strategies and policies in relation to anti-social behaviour.
- 7.5. That this report be shared with all partners within the Safer Cheshire East Partnership, to inform of the findings, lessons learned and recommendations that arose from this review.

8. Background Documents

8.1. Documents referenced during the review or to assist in the forming of this final report:

- Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/12/contents/enacted>
- Safer Cheshire East Partnership Action Plan 2017-20
<https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/environment/community-safety/scep-partnership-plan-2017-2020-v2.pdf>

9. Contact Information

9.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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