

# Agenda item 7

**Report to:** East Durham Homes Board

**Date:** 24 November 2011

**Title of report:** CIIP Tenant Inspection of Anti Social Behaviour Service

**Reported by:** Bernadette Tidyman, Customer Inspection and Improvement Panel

**Report for:** Decision

## 1. Purpose of report and link to strategic objectives

The purpose of this report is to outline findings from the recent ASB tenant inspection, and highlight any recommendations. The report links to 3 of the East Durham Homes' strategic objectives:

- Regenerating estates and communities
- Involving customers to improve services
- Delivering excellent services to all

The report also links to all 5 key strategic objectives for ASB:

- Preventing ASB in the district
- Reduce ASB through partnership working
- Increase tenant involvement to address ASB
- Deliver Respect Standard for Housing Management
- Effective use of the ASB tools and legislative powers

## 2. Recommendations

As a result the CIIP inspection 15 recommendations have been made. These are outlined in an action plan in appendix for the Board's consideration.

## 3. Executive summary

This is the second inspection undertaken by the Customer Inspection and Improvement Panel. The CIIP carried out an extensive desktop review including ASB policies and procedures, national standards, local offers, and performance information to name a few. The inspection also involved job shadowing, focus groups, telephone interviews, interviews

with staff members, consultations with tenants and resident groups, and a customer focus group.

The CIIP did not limit the scope of the inspection, but instead considered all aspects of the ASB service including staff safety and the relevant support mechanisms in place, harassment, hate crime, vulnerable customers, domestic violence and use of technical equipment to solve a case. The report covers the main findings of the inspection, recognising the good practice already in place such as extensive partnership working, the dedication of the staff and good customer access to the service. The report also outlines some of the main recommendations including improvements to publicity (particularly for residents), additional technical equipment, and improved relations between Durham County Council to try and tackle issues surrounding private tenants. A full list of recommendations including timescales and responses can be found in the Appendix.

#### **4. Risk implications**

The CIIP feels that if the recommendations are not investigated and/or implemented the ASB service will remain good but will not have the chance to become an excellent service. In particular, equipment such as additional CCTV cameras and sound equipment would ensure issues surrounding persistent perpetrators are resolved quickly. Otherwise the wellbeing of those in the surrounding area could be greatly reduced.

#### **5. Consultation**

As part of the inspection, the CIIP has consulted the following people:

- Staff
- Enforcement Officers
- Senior Enforcement Officer
- Tenancy Support Manager
- Partners
- Police
- Customers
- Mystery shopping group
- Tenant and resident groups/ PACT meetings
- Customer Focus groups
- Telephone interviews

On completion of the inspection, the CIIP consulted with the Senior Enforcement Officer and Tenancy Support Manager to review the recommendations.

## 6. Background

The Customer Inspection and Improvement Panel chose to look into anti social behaviour service for two reasons:

1. It naturally led on from previous inspection of the estate management service. In particular, issues were raised in the customer focus group about people feeling safe in their community.
2. Performance information from VMS surveys which highlighted that the service, although registering as 'good', was not always meeting its target. At the time of selecting which service to look at, ASB was in the red and direction of travel was down (see third quarter performance report 2010/11).

## 7. Findings

The enforcement team works closely with other providers such as Safe Durham Partnership, attends meetings such as LMAPs and is a member of benchmarking groups such as Northern Housing Consortium and the CIH. In an interview the CIIP carried out with the Police, they were extremely complimentary describing the enforcement team as 'proactive' and highlighted they have an excellent working relationship with them.

Since 2009 EDH has worked with partners in the Safe Durham Partnership to raise awareness of the anti-social behaviour with year 8 pupils from local comprehensive schools. They also hold events with other agencies for 16-25 year olds. The ASB team at EDH use an Educate/Enforce and Prevent System which is working very well in terms of the reduced number of evictions and repetitive crime. EDH have a well managed system to tackle ASB and the team feel that through early intervention along with youth and parenting contracts ASB is being tackled more effectively. The enforcement team at EDH were very keen to explore the use of a community justice panel as a means of resolving ASB issues when the idea was put to them by the CIIP.

A survey carried out in 2008 (and included in the ASB strategy) showed 33.8% of tenants found it difficult to get hold of the right person to report ASB to. The CIIP found that the problem appears to have been overcome by the new script and the fact that people are directed to the right person via the contact centre. The HUB system means tenant information is much more secure and all relevant information is collated in one place. In addition, methods of reporting ASB have improved including via the website, texting and also surgeries in the community

There is now a significant level of customer involvement e.g. focus groups and a service review panel which has led to a marked improvement in the service due to the customers' suggestions and

input. The enforcement team are passionate about their work and are always looking for ways to improve the service as well as being open to suggestions. In the last financial year the team exceeded their VMS survey targets for 5 months and were very close to it for the remainder of the year, registering as a 'good' service, which demonstrates on average customers are happy with the service. They have reached the finals for 2 awards and are recognised as good practice by the CIH.

The CIIP consulted with those who have had their case of ASB closed within the last 6 months. In general the feedback from the customer focus group and telephone interviews was very positive. People were happy to report an incident of ASB to EDH, and were generally happy with the service they received, in particular with members of staff who had dealt with them. It must be noted some people have suffered ongoing or repeat cases which has caused ongoing distress.

There was a great lack of understanding of the service at residents groups, in particular a very pessimistic view about perpetrators being caught and no concept of the out of hours work the team does. It must be noted these complaints were from residents who do not necessarily benefit from any information about the anti social behaviour service that East Durham Homes provides.

The CIIP found there is limited communication between DCC & EDH in terms of ASB carried out by private tenants. Feedback from residents groups implied people who report incidents relating to private tenants find DCC does not take them up or does not act significantly to make it stop. The enforcement team at EDH does its best to pass these issues on, after which they can have no further involvement. Partnership work and accountability between the 2 organisations would improve the lives of both tenants and residents in the area. In addition, if a relationship with other enforcement officers within the county were developed, this would improve links and develop a stronger voice when bringing issues to local government. The CIIP would also like to recommend that all EDH frontline services should work more closely with other providers to be able to take general issues to DCC.

In the past, the team has fallen down in terms of performance by sometimes exceeding the period of 60 days to resolve a case. However, it must be noted that the enforcement team has achieved top quartile in performance for the first quarter of this year according to Housemark highlighting that meeting this target can be dependent on the type of case. Therefore, when reporting on performance East Durham Homes should consider whether it's appropriate to include this target as some cases can't be given timescales or deadlines.

Another area of concern has been repeat offenders e.g. case 1208 where perpetrators behave until their injunction is spent. In the last financial year 7% of cases were reopened. Although this number appears low, cases can be reopened several times causing ongoing distress to the victim. The CIIP recognises the enforcement team can

be hindered by the necessary procedures required by law, and also that courts tend to take a sympathetic approach to ASB involving vulnerable people, and understands the situation will not easily be resolved. However, earlier use of injunctions for example should be considered due to the distress caused to neighbours who have to suffer ongoing distress.

#### **8. Impact for customers (including access and customer care)**

Many of the recommendations will benefit customers as they will see an improvement in the service and feel more secure in their homes. If there were more CCTV cameras and sound recording equipment more tenants would be able to have their cases solved quicker. Also the locks for the mailboxes would prevent detrimental harm to properties and give great peace of mind to tenants.

#### **9. Impact on Equality and Diversity**

As referred in the previous section, mailbox locks would give peace of mind to tenants suffering anti-social behaviour and in particular may help those suffering from hate crime or domestic violence.

#### **10. Impact on value for money**

There are a number of positive impacts on value for money. If the recommendations were to be considered savings in the long term will be greatly beneficial, for example, if EDH provided the ASB team with extra CCTV cameras and sound recording equipment more reported cases could be investigated, meaning more evidence and cases being resolved more quickly. Furthermore, better quality cameras i.e. one that records in colour would produce a clearer picture which could potentially reduce the time spent analysing them. We are aware staff share vehicles where possible. However, when job shadowing the CIIP noticed a few occasions where vehicles could have been shared and encourages the team to do this wherever possible to save on time and fuel expenses. Additionally, if staff were doing a visit to tenants they could save postage by taking VMS surveys with them.

#### **11. Legal impact**

Although there are no legal implications in this report, the CIIP recommends that the enforcement team keep abreast of changes in legislation.

#### **12. Financial impact**

There are numerous actions identified within the report that may have a financial impact. Making money available now to cover the cost of CCTV and sound equipment etc. will in the long run benefit EDH and its tenants. EDH will have to assess the feasibility of carrying out the

actions and the costs associated with them and possibly look for funds elsewhere.

### **13. Further considerations**

The following recommendations were considered by the CIIP, but were not included in the action plan as they were not viable.

- *Ensure satisfaction rates are not calculated by adding together respondents who were 'fairly satisfied' and 'very satisfied' (for example in the most recent STATUS survey) for greater transparency.* EDH already reports broken down satisfaction rates for internal use. For external benchmarking EDH enters information separately, but organisations such as Housemark etc may choose to report this differently.
- *Abandoned property is stored for 6 months. Consider reducing this to 3 months.* It was not realistic to change the current procedure due to the legal requirements.
- *Look into selling absent tenants' property to try and recover some of the costs incurred.* The CIIP thought this would be a good way to raise additional capital for the company. However the panel discovered that Morrison already have an agreement with CRATE to collect abandoned property from voids, and that the little that is left is worth little or nothing.
- *Think about linking up with other housing providers within Durham County to keep each other informed about ASB in each area and encourage setting up a group to support each other.* On reflection, the CIIP found there were sufficient mechanisms in place to share information and work in partnership such as LMAPs locally and the Northern Consortium regionally. Furthermore, the CIIP realised the importance of strategic links such as the Social Landlords Crime and Nuisance Group.
- *Staff should vehicle share at all times where possible.* The panel found car sharing and route planning was happening on the whole. However, when meeting staff from other departments for a site visit car sharing was not always upheld. It was noted that staff have their own case load and on the whole cover different geographical areas, hence why it is not possible to always car share.
- *Work with the police to make use of text evidence for perpetrators.* Although the ASB team thought this was a good idea, it was not possible to enforce it due to the evidence being confidential.

### **14. Previous inspections**

A progress report regarding the recommendations for the estate management inspection has been included with this report in Appendix 2. Of the 23 recommendations made, 16 have been implemented. The one recommendation that has not been completed on time is:

7. Ensure EDH is benchmarking effectively with other similar providers in County Durham.

Progress made so far: An agreement has been reached with Dale and Valley and Durham City Homes to request DCC to develop common service standards for DCC ground maintenance services. DCC is still waiting for one piece of information before the standards, which will be used for monitoring and benchmarking, can be finalised.

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