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Anti social behaviour in London

Setting the context for the London Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy

July 2005



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In collaboration with Association of London Government, London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority, British Transport Police, City of London Police, Metropolitan Police Authority, Government Office for London, Metropolitan Police Service, Transport for London, Housing Corporation, Youth Justice Board

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Summary

This report presents the findings of research on anti-social behaviour (henceforth ASB) in London. The research explored the impact of ASB on the lives of Londoners and examined how agencies are responding to problems of ASB across London. The overall aim of the research was to inform, and set the context for, the development of the London Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy. The strategy is being produced by 11 cross-London agencies with shared responsibilities for tackling ASB, and establishes a regional framework for action on ASB.

There were four main components to the research:

- A review of findings of recent surveys of Londoners' attitudes to ASB.
- Focus groups with Londoners from minority and marginalised groups.
- A review of data on relevant agencies' ASB workloads.
- An assessment of responses to ASB in three contrasting London boroughs.

Survey findings

The evidence from recent attitudinal surveys strongly suggests that most Londoners are satisfied with where they live. However, there tends to be more concern with ASB in London than in other regions of England and Wales; and it is clear that a variety of ASB problems have a major impact on the quality of life of a significant minority of Londoners. In particular, Londoners have concerns about ASB that involves environmental degradation, and – to a lesser extent – about behaviour by groups of children or teenagers that is perceived as intimidating.

Perceptions of local ASB can have a damaging effect on Londoners' sense of safety in their neighbourhoods. For those Londoners who are generally not happy with where they live, local problems of ASB (perceived and/or actual), along with fear of crime, play a large part in their feelings of dissatisfaction. This finding supports the work of other researchers and commentators (particularly writers in the United States) who have argued that problems of ASB can contribute to, and even spark, cycles of social and economic decline in neighbourhoods.

Focus group findings

The participants in the focus groups conducted for this study mostly had a broad understanding of the concept of ASB. While they believed that certain kinds of ASB were frequently associated with children and young people, they also recognised that ASB can be perpetrated by people of all ages and backgrounds.

The comments of the focus group participants illustrated the variety of ways in which ASB impacts on their lives. In some cases it can be a minor irritant, but in other cases can cause serious offence or distress (such as in instances of homophobic or racist verbal abuse). ASB that takes the form of environmental degradation can make people feel ill-at-ease in their neighbourhoods or even in their homes. Some kinds of ASB – even supposedly minor problems such as parking or cycling on pavements – may make it

difficult for physically vulnerable individuals to get out and about. And other forms of ASB, such as the public sale and use of drugs, can cause fear and intimidation, and drive people away from particular areas.

Many of the focus group participants suggested that ASB reflects the perpetrators' lack of respect for others or their environment. This lack of respect can be a matter of simple ignorance, the inability to understand the perspectives of others, or carelessness. In other cases, the lack of respect goes hand-in-hand with a malicious intent: that is, a wish to harm others or cause damage. In many of the focus groups, boredom among young people and poor parenting were identified as factors that cause or contribute to these general tendencies.

Workload statistics

Measuring the prevalence of ASB in London is an extremely difficult task, because of lack of clarity over definitions of ASB and the inherent subjectivity of the concept, however it is defined. Taking into account these difficulties of measurement, we decided that in order to build up our picture of ASB across London, we would look at workload statistics relating to ASB for key agencies. The findings of this part of the research include the following:

- The results of the Home Office 'one-day count' of ASB carried out in September 2003 suggest that over 3 million ASB incidents are reported to relevant agencies across London every year.
- It is estimated that of the 23 million incidents dealt with by the Metropolitan Police CADMIS system over the three years to end March 2004, just under 2.5 million, or 11 per cent, related to ASB. These ASB incidents were concentrated across the inner boroughs, with the highest densities in Westminster and Camden.

Local responses to ASB

Across London, the borough-based crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRPs) have responsibility for identifying and tackling local problems of ASB. Under the national strategy on ASB, every CDRP is now required to audit the extent of ASB in its area and to include specific ASB priorities in its crime and disorder strategy. Each CDRP is also required to identify an individual who has responsibility for co-ordinating work on ASB.

For the purposes of this study, we explored local responses to ASB by focussing primarily on the work being carried out in three specific boroughs. We selected three CDRPs which, between them, are grappling with a variety of ASB problems and illustrate a range of approaches. In their strategy documents, all three CDRPs note high levels of local concern with problems of ASB, and list a large number of ASB issues that they are tackling – ranging from relatively minor problems to serious crimes. ASB is, moreover, a theme that cross-cuts the partnerships' major strategic priorities.

The three CDRPs undertake a variety of enforcement and preventive activities in combination with their efforts to tackle ASB. These range from targeted enforcement to educational activity; from early intervention work to community engagement. This multi-

dimensional approach to ASB is typical of London CDRPs, and reflects the diversity of the ASB problems being tackled by the partnerships – and the breadth of the partnerships' definitions of ASB.

Conclusions

The findings of this study have five major implications for the development of the London ASB Strategy.

1. Strategic work on ASB in London must be based on a sound understanding of the differing levels and effects of ASB. This means recognising that ASB can have devastating consequences for some individuals and communities; but also that there are lesser forms of ASB that intrude on Londoners' lives without necessarily causing enormous concern. The London strategy should promote *proportionate* and *tailored* responses to the wide range of behaviours that are anti-social.
2. The London ASB Strategy must avoid perpetuating stereotypes of young people and children as inherently troublesome or anti-social. While it is important to address problems of ASB that are caused by young people, a focus on these issues must not be allowed to divert attention from the many forms of ASB committed by adults; and the experiences of children and young people as victims of ASB must not be overlooked. The London strategy should also encourage relevant agencies to take a reflective approach to problems of ASB associated with young people. This means, for example, addressing the underlying causes of ASB committed by young people, and the negative perceptions of young people that can result in exaggerated fears of ASB.
3. ASB is not always intentional and malicious, and often reflects ignorance, carelessness or thoughtlessness. Moreover, what one individual may deem to be ASB, another may regard as entirely reasonable behaviour: for example, with respect to noise or rowdy behaviour, different individuals or groups have different levels of tolerance. In a city with a population as ethnically, culturally and economically diverse as London's, the scope for 'unintended' or 'unconscious' ASB is vast. As a regional framework for tackling ASB, the London strategy should thus support efforts to improve mutual understanding and communication within and between local communities.
4. The above three points incline us towards the same general conclusion – that action on ASB needs to balance enforcement with prevention. In order to strike the right balance, the London ASB Strategy must encourage programmes of action that involve long-term as well as short-term solutions, and tackle the causes of ASB as well as the symptoms. It is also crucial that where enforcement action against ASB perpetrators is employed, this is combined with the provision of support for the perpetrators, where this is needed to address the root causes of their behaviour. In the absence of support, enforcement may have the effect of further marginalising those individuals who are already socially excluded – and hence make their involvement in ASB more rather than less likely.

5. A phenomenon as highly diverse and complex as ASB demands diverse and flexible responses; and most of these responses are necessarily provided at a local level. In this context, the role of a regional strategy should primarily be to support and facilitate local action. Given the extent and scope of ASB-related activity already being undertaken by London's 33 crime and disorder reduction partnerships, it cannot all be tracked or overseen by the London strategy. The strategy can, however, identify the ways in which the regional agencies can assist, advance and – where appropriate – supplement the local action.

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1 Introduction

This document considers the extent of anti-social behaviour (henceforth 'ASB') in London and explores Londoners' attitudes to ASB. It has been produced in support of the London Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy for 2005 to 2008 (GLA, 2004a).

The London ASB Strategy

London is one of the world's most populous and diverse capital cities. It is a city with an immensely rich history and vibrant cultural life, which attracts vast numbers of tourists and other visitors. London is Europe's premier financial centre, and contains both large concentrations of wealth and large concentrations of poverty (often alongside each other). Like any large, modern city, London also has its share of problems of ASB.

Across London, the primary duty to respond to crime and ASB lies with the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs)¹ based in each of London's 33 boroughs. However, agencies with cross-London responsibilities also contribute to the capital's safety and orderliness. These organisations include the 11 signatories to the London ASB Strategy.

The strategy's signatories

Assoc. of London Government	London Fire & Emergency Planning Auth.
British Transport Police	Metropolitan Police Authority
City of London Police	Metropolitan Police Service
Government Office for London	Transport for London
Greater London Authority	Youth Justice Board
Housing Corporation	

These 11 agencies have shared responsibilities for tackling ASB at a regional level. The London ASB Strategy, which they have jointly produced, aims to identify, co-ordinate and direct their work with respect to ASB. This strategy thus provides a regional framework for ASB work, which will bridge the gap between the national strategy on ASB and the local programmes of action being developed and implemented by the London CDRPs.

The development of the strategy entailed close collaboration between the 11 signatory agencies and a consultation exercise undertaken with key stakeholders – that is, statutory and non-statutory agencies and partnerships engaged in tackling ASB across London.² Additionally, the working group charged with developing the strategy decided that an in-depth study of ASB in London was needed to inform the strategic work and provide a context for it. This document reports the findings of that study.

¹ These were established under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and are partnerships between the police, local authorities and other key agencies.

² A consultation document, *The London Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy: Proposals for Consultation with Stakeholders*, was produced in April 2004 (GLA 2004b).

Aims and methods of the study

The study aimed to:

- summarise the views of Londoners towards ASB
- examine in depth the views of groups whose voices tend not to be heard
- assess London agencies' workloads with respect to ASB
- chart local responses to ASB.

We have used a variety of methods to pursue these aims. To chart the views of Londoners we have reviewed and analysed relevant findings of a range of surveys of Londoners: namely the London sub-samples of the British Crime Survey 2003/04, the Office of National Statistics Omnibus Survey 2004,³ the 2003 Annual London Survey and the 2002 London Household Survey.

In order to gain some insight into the attitudes of Londoners whose views are not necessarily reflected in survey findings, we conducted primary research in the form of focus groups. This work was specifically commissioned for this study by the Greater London Authority, the Government Office for London and the Housing Corporation. We carried out a total of ten focus groups with Londoners from different backgrounds. The focus group discussions were structured around questions about the problems caused by ASB and how ASB can be tackled.

The main sources of information on agencies' ASB workloads were calls recorded by the Metropolitan Police Service 'Computer-Aided Dispatch Management Information System' (CADMIS), and London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority data.⁴ The Home Office made available to us statistics on ASB in London derived from their national 'one-day count' of ASB carried out in 2003.

We originally envisaged that we would chart local responses to ASB by producing a summary of activities of all London CDRPs. However, we rapidly learnt from an initial review of CDRP strategy documents that, given the vast scope and diversity of work by CDRPs that has some bearing on ASB, it was simply not feasible to map it out. We therefore decided to focus on three boroughs, which were chosen to represent both inner and outer London, and a range of approaches to tackling ASB. We reviewed the documentation of these boroughs (primarily audit and strategy documents) in order to provide an account of their definitions of ASB, and the tactics and structures they employ in tackling the problem.

Defining 'anti-social behaviour'

The term ASB can cover an enormously wide range of behaviours. (One focus group participant captured the looseness of the term with the comment: '[ASB is], you know,

³ This survey included questions on ASB included for the purposes of a study we are conducting for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. We are grateful to JRF for allowing these figures to be published here.

⁴ The analysis of both datasets was originally carried out by analysts at the Government Office for London.

other people's stuff'.) Acts of minor thoughtlessness and rudeness are 'anti-social'. So too, of course, are serious crimes.

The only definition of ASB in law is to be found in the Crime and Disorder Act, 1998, in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour Orders. It is:

[Acting] in a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as himself.

This definition is sensible as a piece of all-inclusive legal drafting, but it does nothing to capture the particular qualities of ASB as the term is used in political and media debate. The government's initiatives against ASB are clearly targeting behaviour more offensive than simple bad manners – but less intrusive than serious crimes such as burglary, robbery, wounding and rape. When launching its TOGETHER strategy to tackle ASB in October 2003, the government carefully avoided getting bogged down in definitional issues, but offered illustrations of the sort of thing addressed by the strategy, including:

- littering
- vandalism
- vehicle related nuisance
- nuisance behaviour
- intimidation/harassment
- noise nuisance
- rowdy behaviour
- abandoned vehicles
- street drinking and begging
- drug misuse and drug dealing
- animal-related problems
- hoax calls
- prostitution, kerb-crawling, sexual acts.

At the time that the government was launching its strategy, it was probably good politics to avoid being over-prescriptive about terminology. However, now that agencies at local and regional level are contemplating how to 'performance-manage' their ASB strategies, the importance of definitional clarity is beginning to emerge. Certainly the agencies developing the London strategy thought it important to be clear about the range of problems that they planned to tackle in partnership. Without some agreement on this score, it is hard to envisage any coherent joint work on ASB whatsoever.⁵

The strategy partners decided that the strategy should focus not on the extremes of behaviour that can be described as ASB, but on behaviour in the middle-range; that is, behaviour that people find seriously upsetting, but which is best dealt without recourse to the criminal courts. The partners recognised, nevertheless, that the boundaries drawn

⁵ See Jacobson et al. (forthcoming) for discussion of definitions of ASB in policy literature.

between ASB and (on the one hand) lesser and (on the other hand) more serious forms of offensiveness will always be imprecise and somewhat arbitrary.

Thus, for the purposes of the strategy – and this study that supports it – the following definition was developed:

ASB is behaviour that

- causes harassment, alarm or distress
- to individuals not of the same household as the perpetrator, such that
- it requires interventions from the relevant authorities; **but**
- criminal prosecution and punishment may be inappropriate
- because the individual components of the behaviour:
 1. are not prohibited by the criminal law **or**
 2. in isolation, constitute relatively minor offences.

This definition recognises that ASB often, but not always, causes people harassment, alarm or distress by virtue of the *cumulative* impact of repeated incidents that in isolation may not be a serious concern. These problems often have different effects and demand different responses to more serious forms of criminality.

However, we recognise that some ASB enforcement measures have proved to be useful measures for addressing more serious forms of crime. For example, there are clear benefits to using anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) to restrict drug dealers or street robbers from areas where they have previously been active. In defining ASB – for the purposes of the London ASB Strategy and this supporting document – in terms of non-criminal and minor criminal behaviour, we are by no means ruling out the use of ASB remedies to tackle certain forms of serious criminality.

Within the compass of our definition we have developed a typology of ASB that combines considerations of motivation and outcome to group ASB into three categories:

1. **Interpersonal/malicious ASB** – behaviour towards individuals, groups or organisations causing harassment, alarm or distress eg hoax calls, vandalism directed at groups/individuals and intimidation.
2. **Environmental ASB** – behaviour that deliberately or carelessly degrades the local environment – eg dog-fouling, noise nuisance, graffiti, setting fire to rubbish, fly-tipping.
3. **ASB restricting access to public space** – threatening or physically obstructive behaviours stopping people using public or semi-public places eg intimidating behaviour by groups of youths, aggressive begging, street drinking or drug misuse and kerb crawling.

The structure of this report

This report has four main sections. First, we look at what can be learnt from recent survey data about Londoners' general concerns in relation to ASB. Secondly, we explore the views on ASB of members of certain minority and marginalised groups, as these were revealed by our focus groups. We then move on to look at the workloads generated by ASB for key agencies in London. Finally, we provide an account of how three London CDRPs are defining and responding to local problems of ASB. Key findings of the study are drawn together in a brief conclusion.

2. Londoners' concerns about anti-social behaviour

At a general level, concern about ASB appears to be higher in London than elsewhere in England and Wales. The 2003/04 British Crime Survey found that 25 per cent of London respondents perceived the levels of disorder in their area to be 'high', compared to 17 per cent across England and Wales as a whole. Within London there is a marked inner-outer split, with 32 per cent of people in inner London perceiving disorder as 'high', compared to 22 per cent in outer London.

These relatively high levels of perceived disorder in London appear to reflect a comparatively high crime rate in London. According to Home Office figures for 2003/04, London has the highest rate of recorded crime of all regions in England and Wales. This rate stands at 145 recorded crimes per 1,000 population, compared to a rate for all regions of 113 per 1,000 population (Moore and Yeo, 2004). The Home Office figures show that in 2003/04, recorded rates of robbery, violence against the person, theft and handling and vehicle crime in London were above average for England and Wales, while rates of burglary and criminal damage were below average.

The factors underlying the relatively high rates of crime and disorder in London are complex, and it is beyond the scope of this study to explore them. It suffices to note here that the unique character of London within England and Wales – the size of its population, the high levels of economic and social deprivation in many neighbourhoods (contrasting with areas of great wealth), the enormous visitor numbers, and so on – enhances its vulnerability to crime in various respects.

In this chapter, we look at the specific concerns of Londoners with respect to ASB, and the impact of these concerns on their lives. In so doing, we draw on three main sources of data:

- The Office of National Statistics (ONS) Omnibus survey conducted in April 2004. This survey included a series of questions about respondents' views on different ASB questions. The national sample totalled 1,682 respondents, of whom 139 were Londoners.
- The Annual London Survey (ALS) for 2003. The ALS is an opinion poll which has been carried out every year since 2001. The 2003 survey had 1,429 respondents.
- The London Household Survey (LHS) 2002. The LHS provides reliable London-wide, sub-regional and GLA constituency level information on housing issues, household characteristics and income data. The 2002 survey covered 8,000 households.⁶

Levels of satisfaction with London life

Although – as noted above – general concerns about ASB may be higher in London than in other regions in England and Wales, most Londoners appear to be happy with where they live. The 2003 ALS found that 78 per cent of Londoners were either fairly or very satisfied with their local neighbourhood, compared to 14 per cent who described

⁶ The LHS is conducted by the GLA, who acknowledge the assistance of the Housing Corporation in funding the survey.

themselves as fairly or very dissatisfied. These figures are supported by the finding from the 2002 LHS that 79 per cent of householders were very or fairly satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live.

More broadly, the ALS also found 71 per cent of respondents to be very or fairly satisfied with London as a city to live in, compared to 15 per cent who were fairly or very dissatisfied.

Concerns about community safety

However, despite the general satisfaction of most Londoners with where they live, ASB and crime more generally are issues that cause anxiety. Respondents to the ALS were asked about 'the two or three worst things about living in London'; in response, over a third (38 per cent) cited safety in London/crime rates. The survey also asked people 'How safe do you feel walking outside in this neighbourhood in the evening by yourself'. A third (33 per cent) said that they felt a bit or very unsafe, while just under two-thirds (60 per cent) said fairly/very safe.

ALS respondents were also asked why they think people feel unsafe in their area. The most common answers are shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Thinking about safety, for what reasons, if any, do you think people feel unsafe in this area?

<i>Most frequent answers:</i>	Per cent
Fear of being mugged or physically attacked	29
Fear of burglary	25
Teenagers hanging around on the streets	23
Lack of police presence	21
Drug dealers	14
Vandalism and other deliberate damage to property or vehicles	14
Too many gangs	11
Fear of the dark/night	10
Lack of adequate street lighting	10
People being drunk or rowdy in the streets/ public places	10
Gun crime	6
Run down/threatening local environment (eg graffiti, derelict buildings etc)	6
Fear of racial harassment	5

Source: Annual London Survey 2003

The responses shown in Table 2.1 demonstrate that ASB issues (shown in bold), as well as more serious crime, are among the causes of anxiety. For example, the ASB issue of 'teenagers hanging around' was mentioned by 23 per cent of respondents. While seeing

teenagers hanging around cannot be compared to being mugged in terms of actual impact, for some it is the threat of what the teenagers *might* do. This may be to shout out inappropriate comments, it may be mugging, or it may be nothing at all – or even something entirely positive, like calling out ‘good morning’. It is the uncertainty and the perception of threat that can be the problem.

When asked about how the authorities should respond to community safety problems, respondents most frequently called for a greater police presence, followed by more CCTV and better street lighting. Twenty-one per cent cited a ‘lack of police presence’ as a reason for people feeling unsafe in their area. Although 42 per cent of those surveyed were fairly/very satisfied with the way their area was policed, 30 per cent were fairly or very disappointed.

Specific ASB concerns

When asked about the specific issues that affect their general quality of life, Londoners tend to mention a wide range of ASB concerns (alongside other issues). The ONS survey respondents – in London and elsewhere – were asked how much their quality of life was affected by certain ASB problems. Table 2.2 shows the responses.⁷

⁷ A choice of six responses was offered: ‘it occurs but has no effect at all’; ‘...has a minor effect’; ‘...has a fairly big effect’; ‘...has a very big effect’; ‘this is not a problem in my local area’; ‘don’t know’.

Table 2.2: Quality of life affected by different ASB issues (by region)

Per cent 'It occurs and has fairly big effect/very big effect on my quality of life'							
	London	Scotland	The North	Mid-lands & East Anglia	South East	Wales	South West
Litter/rubbish	31	18	17	17	15	18	11
Vandalism/graffiti	25	20	18	17	17	10	7
Rowdy teenagers in the street	34	23	21	18	16	18	10
Drug use/dealing	23	19	19	17	12	16	11
Abandoned/burned out vehicles	22	8	9	8	9	5	5
Noisy neighbours	22	8	9	8	11	6	3
Begging	25	4	2	6	4	0	1
N=1682	N=139	N=132	N=411	N=488	N=247	N=93	N=171

Source: ONS Omnibus Survey 2004

Although the total number of responses in London was not high, Table 2.2 indicates that Londoners are likely to have greater concerns than others about a range of ASB issues. This is in line with the BCS finding about Londoners' general concerns about disorder. The issues that had the biggest effect on the lives of the London respondents were rowdy teenagers in the street and litter/rubbish.

The LHS 2002 asked how respondents felt different issues, including ASB issues, had affected their quality of life in their neighbourhoods over the past year or so. The responses are displayed in Table 2.3, with the ASB issues highlighted in bold text.

Table 2.3 Responses of ‘serious problem’ to the question ‘Could you tell me how much of a problem [these issues] have been over the last year or so in affecting the quality of your life in this neighbourhood...’

ASB issue	Male (%)	Female (%)	All (%)
Heavy traffic	34	33	34
Problems with street parking	31	34	32
Litter and rubbish in the streets	26	30	28
General level of crime	23	27	25
Vandalism and hooliganism	23	25	24
Fear of being burgled	20	25	23
Pollution (inc. air quality and traffic fumes)	16	20	18
Graffiti	17	19	18
Presence of drug dealers/users	15	18	17
Problems with dogs/dogs mess	12	20	16
Troublesome teenagers/children	11	12	11
State of open spaces/gardens	8	10	9
Racial harassment	5	6	5
Problems with neighbours	4	5	4

Source: London Household Survey 2002

Table 2.3 shows that of all ASB issues cited as a ‘serious problem’ by the LHS respondents, litter caused the greatest concern (28 per cent of respondents), followed by vandalism/hooliganism (23 per cent). It is interesting to note that only 11 per cent of respondents reported that they found troublesome teenagers/children to be a serious problem. This contrasts with the findings of the ONS survey and ALS that (respectively) ‘rowdy teenagers’ and ‘teenagers hanging around’ were among the top ASB concerns.

The data presented in this chapter thus far suggest that local problems of ASB do not have a major impact on the quality of life of most Londoners. However, the seriousness of ASB for that minority of Londoners who are most directly affected must not be overlooked. The findings of the LHS reveal that for those Londoners who are fairly or very *dissatisfied* with their neighbourhoods, local problems of ASB – and crime in general – are often serious concerns.

Table 2.4 demonstrates the relationship between dissatisfaction with the neighbourhood and concerns about crime and ASB. For example, of those LHS respondents who were very dissatisfied with their neighbourhood, 64 per cent thought that vandalism and hooliganism were a serious problem, compared to 13 per cent of those who were very satisfied. Similarly, 41 per cent of the ‘dissatisfied’ saw troublesome teenagers/children as a problem, compared to only four per cent of the ‘satisfied’.

Table 2.4 Householders who thought certain issues were a 'serious problem' by householder satisfaction with their local neighbourhood

Issue a 'serious problem'	Householder satisfaction with neighbourhood (per cent)					
	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dis-satisfied	Fairly dis-satisfied	Very dis-satisfied	No opinion
Heavy traffic	27	34	37	44	49	44
Problems with street parking	26	32	34	42	56	46
Litter and rubbish in the streets	17	27	37	51	59	21
General level of crime	15	22	32	50	72	30
Vandalism and hooliganism	13	22	33	50	64	13
Fear of being burgled	15	20	25	40	58	13
Pollution (air quality & traffic fumes)	12	18	25	27	34	13
Graffiti	11	17	23	33	40	6
Presence of drug dealers/users	8	14	23	34	52	9
Problems with dogs/dogs mess	11	16	21	25	35	33
Troublesome teenagers/children	4	10	16	28	41	8
State of open spaces/gardens	3	7	10	23	32	7
Racial harassment	3	4	9	11	19	6
Problems with neighbours	1	3	2	9	27	7

Source: London Household Survey 2002

Environmental concerns

The findings on ASB concerns reported above indicate that environmental ASB – that is, ASB involving the degradation of the local environment – tends to disturb more Londoners than interpersonal/malicious ASB or ASB restricting access to public space. In particular, littering, graffiti and vandalism cause much concern.

Sixty-one per cent of respondents to the 2003 ALS disagreed with the statement that London is a clean city (although 50 per cent agreed that it is a green city). This survey also asked respondents about specific problems relating to the quality of the environment in London. The responses to this question (presented in Table 2.5) demonstrate that the environmental concerns of Londoners extend well beyond ASB-related issues. For example, pollution from traffic and air quality featured high on the list of concerns, alongside the ASB issues of litter, dumped household waste and abandoned vehicles. Where 'noise' is cited as a problem, this may refer both to noise resulting from ASB, and to other forms of noise associated with city life.

Table 2.5 Thinking about the quality of the environment in London, how much of a problem, if at all, do you consider each of the following to be?

Issue	% responses 1-2 (1 = 'major problem')	% responses 4-5 (5 = 'no problem at all')
Pollution from traffic/exhaust fumes	64	13
Litter	59	18
Air quality	52	24
Abandoned/dumped household waste	47	25
Noise	46	28
Abandoned vehicles	44	26
Pollution of rivers and canals	40	26
Loss of green spaces	38	32
Loss of plants and wildlife	38	30

Source: Annual London Survey 2003

Summary

The evidence from recent surveys strongly suggests that most Londoners are satisfied with where they live. However, there tends to be more concern with ASB in London than in other regions of England and Wales and it is clear that a variety of ASB problems have a major impact on the quality of life of a significant minority of Londoners. In particular, Londoners have concerns about ASB that involves environmental degradation, and – to a lesser extent – about behaviour by groups of children or teenagers that is perceived as intimidating.

Perceptions of local ASB can have a damaging effect on Londoners' sense of safety in their neighbourhoods. For those Londoners who are generally not happy with where they live, local problems of ASB (perceived and/or actual), along with fear of crime, play a large part in their feelings of dissatisfaction.

It has often been argued (particularly in the United States) that problems of ASB can contribute to, and even spark, cycles of social and economic decline in neighbourhoods. Incidents – even minor incidents – of ASB are said to cause fear of crime, and ultimately help to create an environment over which residents cannot or will not exercise informal

social control, and in which crime flourishes. Skogan, for example, argues that disorder 'is an instrument of destabilisation and neighbourhood decline' because it

erodes what control neighbourhood residents can maintain over local events and conditions. It drives out those for whom stable community life is important, and discourages people with similar values, from moving in. It threatens house prices and discourages investment (Skogan, 1990: 3).

On the basis of the research reviewed in this chapter, it is difficult to reach a conclusion about whether ASB tends to be a causal factor in, or simply reflects, wider neighbourhood problems. What is clear, however, is that ASB, feelings of insecurity and neighbourhood dissatisfaction are closely inter-linked. It follows from this that where problems of ASB are effectively addressed, this should bring wide and significant benefits to local communities.

3 The concerns of minority and marginalised Londoners

There are groups of Londoners – such as those aged over 70 or under 18, people with mental health problems, or those from certain black and minority ethnic groups – whose views and experiences are not necessarily reflected in survey findings. Moreover, some of these groups may have particular concerns about or experiences relating to ASB. For example, older people may feel especially intimidated by ASB, or perceived ASB, committed by children or young people; and some young people may believe that they are disproportionately targeted by ASB enforcement action.

Taking this into account, it was agreed that the research for this study should include a series of focus groups with minority and marginalised Londoners. The focus group methodology also enabled us to explore certain perceptions and understandings of ASB in more depth than we could do by reviewing survey findings.

The focus groups were held in a variety of localities across inner and outer London boroughs. A total of 90 people participated in the ten groups listed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Focus group compositions

Participants' backgrounds	Participants' localities	No. participants
Black women; housing association tenants	Inner London, north	5
Men aged 16-18; unemployed and out of education	Inner London, north	9
Women aged 16-18; unemployed and out of education	Inner London, north	10
Men & women with mental health & substance misuse problems; housing association tenants	Various north London boroughs	13
Gay & lesbian housing association tenants	Various north London boroughs	5
Men & women aged over 70 in local authority sheltered housing	Outer London, west	7
Men & women with physical disabilities; housing association tenants	Outer London, east	12
Bangladeshi women	Inner London, north	11
Black African men	Outer London, south	9
Kurdish men	Various north London boroughs	9

Each focus group discussion lasted roughly an hour and was tape-recorded. The sessions focused on a simple set of questions:

- Who commits ASB?
- What forms does ASB take?
- What are the causes of ASB?
- What should be done about ASB?

The views expressed by the focus group participants are not, of course, representative of the views of minority or marginalised groups in general. However, the issues that emerged in the focus group discussions vividly illustrate some of the specific concerns of Londoners with respect to ASB.

Who commits ASB?

It is often assumed that most ASB is carried out by young people; and that groups of young people pose the biggest threats. However, there was general agreement among the focus groups that *all* people are capable of being anti-social, and that young people or children should not be stereotyped as necessarily troublesome.

While acknowledging that certain groupings of young people can certainly be intimidating to others, one participant in the focus group for people with physical disabilities commented: 'We mustn't condemn all children'. Another focus group participant observed: 'Because we don't understand [the] younger generation, we assume they're getting up to no good' (black woman).

A Bangladeshi woman noted that 'older people can also be abusive'. Many of the focus group participants appeared to believe that the defining quality of ASB is not the age of the perpetrator; rather, it is more to do with a lack of respect for other people – and anyone can be guilty of that:

I won't put it down to children. There can be people who are jealous of what you've got and just as they go by, take their keys out of their pocket and leave marks there [on your car] (woman – people with physical disabilities group).

It was made clear (as will be further discussed below) that 'officials' (eg with statutory agencies or transport services), as well as ordinary members of the public, can behave in ways that are anti-social. It was also noted that ASB can be accidental rather than malicious, or that it can be behaviour that is learnt from parents and peers. In one focus group it was observed that individuals who are negatively labelled by others can be propelled into ASB: in these circumstances, 'anti-social behaviour becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy' (black African man).

One of the focus groups was with men aged 16 to 18 who were out of work and out of education – precisely the type of young people who are often perceived as a problem. When asked if they could understand *why* they may be seen as problematic, the response was:

- R1 But how can it be irritating? We're not causing [trouble], you know what I'm saying? Have you ever sat in for an afternoon? You can't handle it man.
- R2 Even sitting outside just on the street corner doing nothing is better than sitting in the house.
- R3 You have to go out like, you have to just see what's happening around the place.

What do you think is ASB?

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, respondents cited a wide range of problems when asked about the forms that ASB takes. Table 3.2 lists the main examples given, which ranged from dog mess, litter and graffiti, and young people congregating, through to intimidation, homophobic and racist verbal abuse, and drink-related violence.

Table 3.2: Examples of anti-social behaviour cited by focus group participants

Focus group	ASB problems cited							
Black women	Gangs of kids	People dumping rubbish	Drinking/ taking drugs	Neighbour problems	Inconsiderate parking	Mopeds on estate	Authorities not collecting rubbish	Racism
Young males 16-18	Drug dealing	'Crack-heads'	Graffiti	Policing use of stop and search	(People see them as the problem)			
Young females 16-18	Verbal abuse	Noisy neighbours	Graffiti	Spitting	Damage to phone boxes	Drug dealing /taking	Mopeds on estate	
Mental-health /substance misuse	Public nuisance	Verbal abuse (from 'the suits')	Public drinking and violence	Vandalism	Aggressive begging			
Gay and lesbian group	Anti-gay verbal abuse	Racist behaviour	Bad manners, ignorance	Gay-on-gay violence and intimidation	Neighbour problems			
Older people aged 70+	Kids throwing stones etc	Vandalism	Graffiti	Bonfires late at night	Inconsiderate parking	General rudeness		
People with physical disabilities	Young people congregating	Drinking in the street	Car fires	Trespass	Children with bikes on pavements	Cars scratched with keys etc	Litter	Rudeness

Bangladeshi women	Gangs of kids (after school)	People dumping rubbish	Dog mess	Racism/ anti-Muslim	Noisy neighbours	Parking on pavements	Drug and alcohol problems	Rude bus drivers
Black African men	Rowdy and abusive behaviour	Damage to property	Graffiti and litter	Swearing	Drunkenness and fighting	Noise pollution	Urinating on the street	Fast driving
Kurdish men	Gangs of kids (esp. on buses)	Alcoholics on buses	Dirty places /litter	Rows with bus drivers	Racism (not a huge problem)			

While most of the examples of ASB reported by the focus group participants fit under the ASB definition adopted by the London ASB Strategy, some of the behaviours cited could perhaps be described as uncivil rather than anti-social. Rudeness, bad manners or general ignorance quite frequently emerged as a concern. Another issue that is probably not covered by the London strategy definition is speeding motorists, who were described as anti-social in one of the focus groups.

To simplify this discussion of how the focus group participants defined ASB, we have grouped their responses under the three headings of interpersonal/malicious ASB, environmental ASB, and ASB restricting access to public space.

Interpersonal/malicious ASB

Examples of interpersonal ASB that concerned the focus group participants ranged from the minor everyday irritant of general rudeness, to more serious experiences of intolerance and prejudice.

ASB as rudeness, lack of consideration

General rudeness or inconsiderate behaviour was considered anti-social by many of the focus group participants. In speaking in these terms, one participant described what he believed to be a general character trait of the British: 'The British are very unfriendly; they hide behind newspapers' (black African man). It was also observed that the tendency of Londoners to avoid getting involved in other people's lives or problems can itself make ASB more likely. People will not interfere when ASB takes place, very often, because they maintain the view that 'it's not my problem' (person with physical disabilities).

Rudeness and lack of concern for others can take the form of foul and abusive language. As the following participant observed:

The kids round here... they swear the most abusive words and they don't care one iota who's listening to them. And the young girls are worse than the boys (male, aged 70 plus).

Whether this is intended or unintended, the use of bad language can evidently cause genuine upset; and it is not just the language of young people that has this effect. Many participants spoke in general terms about the kinds of thoughtless and/or malicious comments that disturbed them – even if such comments might sometimes be seen as an inevitable by-product of the stresses of urban living.

The focus group participants did not necessarily make a distinction between the rudeness of members of the public and that of public workers. For example, in the focus groups with Bangladeshi women and Kurdish men, comments were made about arguments with bus drivers. For example:

- R1 Sometimes the bus driver doesn't stop at the bus stop.
- R2 There should be more trained bus drivers, they're not trained enough.
- R1 And they're rude.

R2 I think bus driver complaints are becoming common now (Bangladeshi women).

There was general agreement among the focus group participants that a key problem is the lack of 'respect' that many Londoners show for others. As one participant put it, 'it's all "me" these days' (black woman). With reference to the actions of young people, the following comment was made in the focus group for people with physical disabilities:

R1 They have no respect for anything.

R2 Exactly, the word respect is no longer in the dictionary. It means nothing. If people have respect for one another then they've got respect for everybody around them.

ASB as prejudice and intolerance

Many of the focus groups participants described incidents of racism and prejudice as ASB. Some spoke about the 'ignorance' underlying ASB that takes the form of offensive comments about minority groups. One participant in the focus group for gays and lesbians observed:

[It] is just like bad manners, just the way that people pass comment, ignorance... I know I'm a queer, they know I'm a queer, tell me something I don't know... I get shouted at every five minutes [although] I don't think it's as bad as it was ten years ago.

Obviously malicious homophobic comments were also described as examples of ASB:

This morning I was walking with my flatmate and some... man started shouting 'you dirty man'. I was like, 'God!' And my flatmate said 'I get this all the time up and down this road, it's an ongoing thing. I can't wait to move' (gay man).

Most participants in the black and minority ethnic focus groups spoke of their experiences of racist comments and verbal abuse. One Kurdish man observed: 'People say "stop speaking Turkish", "get out of the country"... but it doesn't happen often'. Some of the Muslim participants talked of there being an increase in anti-Muslim feeling over recent years; for example:

It was getting better, but after 11th September it's actually got worse. A lot of people you know, they don't wear [head]scarves when they go outside. Before they used to. Because of the fear of other people, they're going to attack them or something like that, or they might comment on their scarf (Bangladeshi woman).

Participants were clear that people of all ages can be guilty of racist ASB:

...Children's parents can become very abusive. Parents also show racist behaviour to ethnic minority school children (Bangladeshi woman).

In the focus group for people with mental health or substance misuse problems (all of whom had previously been homeless, and were now being housed by a homelessness

charity), the participants spoke about their own experiences of prejudice. They argued that although the general public may assume that beggars and rough sleepers are responsible for a lot of ASB, homeless people are in fact more likely to be victims than perpetrators of ASB:

- R1 From the minute you're homeless you get anti-social behaviour from the suits. Often when they're walking past we get abuse, we get spat on.
- R2 Where I used to drink down Waterloo, constantly day in, day out – 'cause I was just sitting there having a beer – people going back and fro to work all day constantly giving abuse, 'go get a job', 'go and get a wash'. We get it constantly (people with mental health/substance abuse problems).

These focus group participants also argued that begging is not necessarily a form of ASB – although 'aggressive begging' is.

Environmental ASB

It is noted above that the focus group participants frequently spoke of ASB as an expression of lack of respect for others. A related theme to emerge from the focus groups was the lack of respect for the environment shown by many Londoners. Examples of environmental ASB mentioned by the participants included:

- graffiti and vandalism
- littering/dumping rubbish
- allowing dogs to foul the pavements
- car fires
- urinating on the street
- excessively loud music.

The importance of living in a clean local environment that is free of litter and graffiti was stressed by many of the focus group respondents. In one group, it was argued that where local residents fail to take care of their environment, this may not simply reflect their lack of respect for where they live; it may also be a product of their cultural backgrounds:

Some people haven't got the culture of throwing the rubbish in the bin, so some haven't adapted their cultures... Because it's a multi-cultural area, people have different morals, different ways of living, so some throw their rubbish away, some don't (Kurdish man).

Most of the focus group participants had little sympathy for self-styled graffiti artists:

- R1 Just because they have to put their little tag everywhere so that everybody knows they've been there.
- R2 Some of them are too old for that man (young women aged 16-18).

Some focus group participants commented that environmental problems can stem, in part, from the failure of the relevant agencies to do their jobs properly, or to promote responsible behaviour in others. In the focus group for black women in housing

association accommodation, for example, complaints were made about delays in rubbish removal. They also pointed out that littering was inevitable if the housing association failed to provide enough, and accessible, rubbish bins for residents. They felt that it was not sufficient for the housing association simply to assume that all residents would make an extra effort to keep their surroundings clean and tidy.

Nonetheless, others thought that local agencies were doing their best in what was an uphill struggle:

The graffiti, especially in my flats, I feel sorry for the council because every time they paint it, the next day it's all back on the walls again (young woman aged 16-18).

Environmental ASB is not limited to the physical environment. In fact, the most frequently cited example of this form of ASB was noise from neighbours. For example, the following comments were made by participants in the Bangladeshi women's focus group:

- R1 My one neighbour, he's single... I have three kids [and] he complained about us... After twelve o'clock, half past two, quarter to three, he's playing music.
- R2 You know, like domestics as well, that can be disturbance as well when they're fighting all day in, out, and you want to sleep but you can't because of the argument.

Noise also emerged as a significant issue in the focus group with men and women aged over 70:

We get loud music played, but you get that everywhere, I suppose that's difficult. Especially on the weekend, the windows are open, the stereos are full blast and nobody ever stops to think. You expect a certain amount don't you, but...

This respondent recognised that a certain level of noise is an unavoidable feature of urban life. Nevertheless, her view was that the playing of loud music becomes an anti-social act when the volume is over a certain level, or when there is little respite from the noise. In her reference to the failure of neighbours to 'think' about how their loud music affects those around them, she echoes other comments about ASB as lack of respect for others.

ASB restricting access to public space

ASB that inhibits or restricts the use of public space can take various forms. It includes intimidating behaviour by young people in groups. As one focus group participant commented: 'On the train there was a gang... about six of them, they were about 15 [years old]. I felt more intimidated by them than I would by a bunch of addicts' (man with mental health or substance misuse problems).

Other forms of ASB impacting on the use of public space are not necessarily linked to young people. Examples cited by the focus group respondents included the issue of

parking on pavements. This can be a serious concern to individuals with limited mobility, as the following comments illustrate:

- R1 We have lots of problems with neighbours parking where they shouldn't park. Apart from lorries parked half on the pavement, we're [also] getting a bus parked up there.
- R2 ...Now all these people [in the sheltered accommodation] have to use the pavement when they go shopping and you've either got children obstructing on one side haven't you, they leave rubbish outside... the bus parking half on the pavement so they haven't got room to pass [and] there's usually two lorries (people aged 70 plus).

In the focus group for people with physical disabilities, the riding of bikes on pavements was mentioned as an example of ASB:

- R1 One of the main things - it's not because I'm nervous of children on bikes - but when you're walking along the shops here, and suddenly from behind - that's one of the most frightening things. Because, particularly at my age, you just can't move quickly... and they weave in and out.
- R2 When they are on their bikes they leave them in the doorway of the shops. They just throw them in the doorway of the shops.

In the same focus group, a participant talked about finding it difficult to get around when large numbers of schoolchildren are on the streets, saying: 'I want to get back here before the kids come out of school'. As with the problems associated with parking or cycling on the pavement, the issue here is ASB that physically inhibits the use of public space among people who feel somewhat vulnerable. The ASB that takes these forms is more likely to be a result of the perpetrators' lack of foresight about how their behaviour affects others, than a reflection of any kind of malicious intent.

In some of the focus groups, the issue of public use and dealing of drugs came to the fore. This is behaviour that can make certain areas feel very unsafe - particularly for those with children:

Drug users, needles lying around, foil... I'm obviously not going to touch it, but for a child it's like, 'what's that?' (young woman, 16-18).

Within this area I've seen people who are freely dealing and taking and they can easily just smoke it in front of people... but nothing's really done. Because of this you can't really take your children and family for a walk because you don't want them to come across this (Kurdish man).

The above comments illustrate two sets of concerns: first, about the risks posed to children and others by drugs paraphernalia left lying around; secondly, about the general impression that overt drug use and dealing will make on children's minds. A third set of concerns is about the unpredictable behaviour of those who are using drugs. As one

young woman commented: 'Some people get depressed when they're taking drugs; some people get violent.'

Public drunkenness – usually at night, and around pubs and clubs – was also described as ASB by some focus group participants. For some, fear of drunken violence clearly has an impact on where they go and what they do; for example:

R1 They're 17 to 18, onto 20 – even 16 – and when you see them they look kind of thuggish... I've seen it happen so many times and you think 'why is this going on?'

R2 And they always walk in groups.

R3 When coming from a club we travel in groups... at the end of the day we have to look after each other.

R2 But really, at the end of the day, should we have to live like that?
(Gay and lesbian group)

Why do people commit ASB?

As should be clear from the above discussion, the focus group participants believed that ASB can be triggered or motivated by anything from minor thoughtlessness to outright malice. Many also felt that a common thread in much of this behaviour, across the spectrum, is that it reflects a lack of respect or consideration for others and for the general environment.

To explain the underlying causes of this lack of respect or consideration is, perhaps, more difficult. When asked about the causes of ASB, most of the focus group participants tended to talk about problems faced by children and young people – despite their general acknowledgment that ASB is not exclusively a 'youth' issue.

When talking about why children and young people get involved in ASB, participants were most likely to refer to the problem of boredom. One young woman commented: 'The kids... are obviously going to get up to mischief in the area because they're bored of doing the same old things'. But why are they bored? It was generally thought that provision for young people was less than ideal. For example:

We blame the kids but they've got nowhere else to play (man aged 70 plus).

I think it comes down to the lack of facilities for young people. They don't really have like places to go. Or even if they do, they are limited (Kurdish man).

It was also suggested that even where provision is relatively good, young people and their parents may not know what is available:

They say they have these facilities for young people but nobody knows about them. They say they have after school clubs [but] they need to be advertised more (Bangladeshi women).

The young focus group participants themselves agreed that there is little for them to do locally, and called for more youth clubs catering specifically for their age group (16 to 18), and along with more employment training. A consequence of poor provision of youth services, they argued, is that young people will be found on the streets with little to do other than get into trouble of various kinds:

At night time [the area is] dangerous, but in the daytime it's alright. But I think at night time you get a bunch of [young people] just hanging around in your block and smoking and sometimes trying to throw stuff through your letterbox (young woman).

In some of the focus groups, the failure of parents to guide and keep control over their children was cited as a cause of ASB. One participant asked: 'Kids are on the street late at night, why?' (black African male). In another group, a possible explanation for the misbehaviour of children was provided: 'It's because the parents don't give two hoots what they're up to, that's why' (man with physical disabilities). Other comments included:

The whole thing is down to parents at the end of the day, because the children are not being brought up properly. And the police will tell you, they go to the parents about their children and they say, 'Well, what can I do about it?' Or they're told to take off in another direction (Male aged 70 plus).

It was also argued that housing allocation policies of local authorities were to blame – indirectly, at least – for some of the ASB problems associated with children and young people. For instance, the focus group with people aged over 70 was held in local authority-owned sheltered accommodation in one of London's outer boroughs. Over the past few years, a new development had been built next door, in order to provide affordable homes to young families. In the eyes of some of the participants in the focus group, this had been the cause of problems:

- R1 Well, [the new development] should never have gone up in the first place.
- R2 Not in a place like this, not in a road like this.
- R3 Unfortunately it doesn't work mixing elderly people with youngsters.
- R4 They're all trouble families.
- R5 The trouble is they'll build houses anywhere there's a spare piece of land these days.
- R3 It's just sad that they were lovely properties and they were given to people who don't respect them.

The local difficulties of ASB were exacerbated by elderly residents' fears of retaliation if they made complaints to the authorities. The warden of the accommodation described what had happened when she called the police on one occasion:

I did have to call the police out a couple of weeks ago, simply because you get so frightened by these youths. And because I told them to go away and stop climbing the fence, they walked round the corner and started throwing stones at my windows. And

then you get a bit unnerved; if they're going to do that, what will they do next? (warden of sheltered accommodation).

The issue of retaliation was raised also in other focus groups:

With neighbours as well, if you complain to them yeah, the next day you might see them dumping rubbish in your [garden] (Bangladeshi woman).

Because now the situation is really bad. The kids will remember your face and you'll be in trouble. If we go across the road and talk to the boys, they'll remember for next time (male – person with physical disabilities).

What should be done about ASB (and by whom)?

When asked about what should be done to tackle ASB, the focus group participants suggested a range of solutions – encompassing both enforcement and preventive options.

Work to prevent ASB

It was generally recognised that while there is a need for enforcement action against the perpetrators of ASB, it is better to prevent ASB from occurring in the first place. However, prevention is not straightforward. While many of the participants believed that ASB often stems from a lack of respect on the part of the perpetrators, they were aware that teaching or persuading people to show more respect and understanding is not an easy task.

Some alluded to the importance of working with parents, so that they become better-equipped to manage their children's behaviour, and to pass on values of respect, tolerance and consideration for others. Other early intervention work with the very youngest children – for example, through schools – was also thought to be important, to ensure that the next generation of young people will develop insight into how their behaviour affects others, and will learn how to determine common standards of acceptable behaviour.

Some participants spoke about the risks of failing to undertake early intervention work – especially with those most at risk of following older siblings and others into offending behaviour:

- R1 We have seen, like, the younger ones, like five year old and seven year olds, starting to follow the older one's footsteps, copying them, start smoking and everything.
- R2 You see seven and eight year olds going around nicking mopeds. They're seven and eight!
(Young women aged 16-18)

As well as talking about the importance of working with young children, focus group participants stressed the need for preventive work with the current generation of

teenagers and young adults. As noted above, the young male participants talked of the need for improved youth club facilities and employment training for their own age group. Participants in other groups also suggested that more activities and resources should be made available to young people. Some argued that even where good work is currently being done, it is not enough. For example:

[The council] have got a double decker bus and it's kitted out with all the computer games, TVs... and everything. They brought it in a couple of times and it did prevent a lot of anti-social behaviour while it was there. But when that goes at six o'clock what are they doing? [They're] back on the streets (woman with physical disabilities).

ASB enforcement

In the opinion of most of the focus group participants, enforcement is bound to be a significant element of local work to tackle ASB. However, the limitations of enforcement options, and particularly of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs),⁸ were noted by some.

For example, it was pointed out that enforcement activities may have the effect simply of shifting ASB from one location to another: 'If they put an anti-social behaviour order on you, all they are doing is moving you on to another borough' (male; mental health or substance misuse problems). Another participant argued, similarly, that where individuals are evicted from social housing on grounds of ASB, they will simply take their problems elsewhere.

Some also claimed that ASBOs and similar measures may be inappropriately or disproportionately targeted at certain social groups. For example, it was argued in the focus group for young men that:

If you're in a group... and say, like a meat wagon goes past, you know you'll get pulled sometimes, especially when there's a lot of them in there, because they've been doing nothing all day, you know what I mean. And if they nick one of us it's a bonus innit. All it takes is one mouthy kid and you're nicked.

Another focus group participant argued:

Every Friday night I walk in Soho and I see [people] kicking the shit out of each other and the police don't seem to be handing out anti-social behaviour orders to them. They're handing out anti-social behaviour orders to people who are homeless and badly dressed rather than people in suits yeah... They're effectively isolating people who are already pretty isolated. These are social discrimination orders; another little step along the way to going to prison (man with mental health or substance misuse problems).

⁸ ASBOs are the most widely used, and most widely recognised, civil enforcement remedy for tackling ASB. ASB perpetrators over the age of ten can receive ASBOs; a breach of an ASBO's conditions (which will involve restrictions on the recipient's behaviour and/or movements) can result in a prison sentence. ASBOs have been used in London to counter a variety of ASB problems, including drug dealing, street sex work and fly-posting. For details on the function and use of ASBOs, see Home Office (2003b).

The above complaint is not simply that enforcement activity can target the 'wrong' people, but also that it can have the effect of entrenching the social exclusion, and consequently the negative behaviour, of the ASB perpetrator. Participants in the focus group for black African men raised similar concerns, arguing: 'The ASBO creates another barrier against that person participating in society'; and, 'It just reinforcing the bad habit, that you are wrong.'

Others, however, were more in favour of ASBOs:

- R1 Well they have that in Soho, they have certain people that are barred from the area that are anti-social, that are prostitutes, that are drug dealers. And if they're seen in the area they're arrested straight away.
- R2 Yeah that's a good idea.
(Gay and lesbian focus group)

The participants in the group for Bangladeshi women also supported the use of ASBOs, but with the following caveat:

- R1 But would they follow it? That's the main thing isn't it: would they follow it? Because you need to keep a tab on that person.
- R2 If one is found to be doing anti-social behaviour, OK, [but] first time get warning, second time better, more punishment.

In one of the focus groups, participants voiced support for the use of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts/Agreements, which are voluntary agreements between perpetrators of ASB and the relevant authorities:⁹

What you're describing for me is the reason why Acceptable Behaviour Agreements are a good middle ground before you start issuing ASBOs, because they give people a chance. They say, 'Well listen, this is the carrot; if you don't respond to this, there's the stick' (woman with mental health or substance misuse problems).

Who is responsible for tackling ASB?

The focus group participants were generally of the opinion that responsibility to tackle ASB lies with various agencies – including the police, local authorities and others. There were calls for partnership work on ASB, which would include local residents as well as the key statutory agencies. Taking just two of the focus groups as examples, the following partnership initiatives were suggested:

Focus group with black women:

- Joint working between the police and tenants' and residents' associations.
- Relevant agencies should find ways of increasing residents' sense of pride in their neighbourhood.
- Further development of mediation services by the local authority and other agencies.

⁹ If a perpetrator subject to an ABA/ABC continues to behave anti-socially, this is often regarded as grounds for an ASBO application. See Home Office (2003b) for details on ABCs.

- Extension of the school curriculum to cover ASB issues.
- Provision of more green spaces and playgrounds.

Focus group with people aged 70 plus:

- Joint working by parents, schools, the local authority and the police.
- Residents should be encouraged to complain more about ASB to the relevant authorities.
- Greater provision of parks and youth clubs for children and young people.

With regard to enforcement action on ASB, the focus group participants saw the police as the main providers, but also argued that others had a role to play – such as local authority-run warden schemes, and housing officers. There were some concerns that the police did not treat incidents of ASB with sufficient seriousness. For example, in the focus group for people with physical disabilities, there was a discussion about a recent incident in which three young people had set cars alight in their estate's car park. One participant commented:

It's the police's responsibility as well because the police didn't bother to come out when that fire was happening. I phoned them up and they didn't want to come out. It was only the fact the fire brigade called them. And they had the audacity to ask me for the description of the kids; but if they came when I said they would have caught them.

Nonetheless, there was general enthusiasm for a more visible police presence: 'We still need the policeman on foot or something, just to have a look around now and then' (women aged 70 plus). It was also stressed that the police, and also wardens, need to make their presence felt throughout neighbourhoods, and not only in those localities most associated with crime or ASB. In the focus group with black African men, it was argued that both the police and wardens have a useful deterrent effect in terms of ASB, but are too inclined to focus their patrolling activity on the local high street.

The recent introduction of Police Community Support Officers in many areas was generally welcomed by the focus group participants, although some concerns were voiced:

The community support [officers] when they first started... they were jumped up, they thought they were coppers. They've actually sorted it out so as they actually realise they're a mid-ground ... And they'll tell you to move along for begging. They check you, but you know they're not going to get nicked, so it's better (female with mental health or substance misuse problems).

What we can learn from the focus group findings?

The focus group participants, for the most part, had a broad understanding of the concept of ASB. While they believed that certain kinds of ASB were frequently associated with children and young people, they also recognised that ASB can be perpetrated by people of all ages and backgrounds.

The effects of ASB on their lives vary widely. It can be a minor irritant (eg when people are rude in their day-to-day dealings with others); on the other hand, it can cause serious offence or distress (such as in instances of homophobic or racist verbal abuse). Certain forms of ASB can make people feel ill-at-ease in their neighbourhoods (eg when there is a lot of litter and graffiti) or even in their homes (when neighbours make a lot of noise). Some kinds of ASB (even what might be perceived as minor problems such as parking or cycling on pavements) may make it difficult for physically vulnerable individuals to get out and about; while other ASB (eg public sale and use of drugs, or public drunkenness) may cause real fear and intimidation, and drive people away from particular areas.

In the view of many of the focus group participants, ASB often reflects the perpetrators' lack of respect for others or for their environment. This lack of respect is sometimes a matter of simple ignorance, or the inability to understand the perspectives of others. It may also be an expression of carelessness or thoughtlessness. In other cases, the lack of respect goes hand-in-hand with a malicious intent: that is, a wish to harm others or cause damage. In many of the focus groups, boredom among young people and poor parenting were identified as factors that may cause or contribute to these general tendencies.

It was generally recognised that tackling ASB, and the problems that underlie ASB, is not a straightforward task. Evidently, individuals who are victims of ASB often feel powerless to do anything about it on their own – particularly because they are often fearful of retaliation. However, among the focus group participants there was a general belief that a combination of preventive and enforcement measures, if properly undertaken by the relevant bodies, could have a significant impact. There was strong support for a partnership approach to tackling ASB – in which local residents could play a part, alongside the police, local authorities, wardens, schools and so forth.

But the focus group participants also identified risks associated with work to tackle ASB – particularly enforcement work. These risks include displacement of ASB, and the alienation of certain groups if they perceive themselves to be disproportionately or unfairly targeted by enforcement activity.

It was also pointed out that the responsibilities of key agencies with respect to ASB extend beyond their ASB-focused activities. For example, it is important that staff in public services are civil in all their dealings with the general public, since rudeness on the part of staff is not only anti-social in itself, but can provoke ASB in others. Housing authorities should consider the ASB implications of all their policies, including housing allocation policies. And local authorities and housing associations should play their full part in ensuring that streets and estates are kept clean and free of litter.

4 Workload statistics on anti-social behaviour in London

In Chapter 2, we discussed survey findings on Londoners' levels of concern with disorder and specific kinds of ASB. These findings tell us about the impact of ASB on Londoners' quality of life, but reveal little about the extent of actual ASB incidents across London. To measure the prevalence of ASB in London is, in fact, an extremely difficult – if not impossible – task.

The difficulties associated with measuring ASB partly relate to the lack of clarity in official definitions of the concept. However, even if we use the relatively narrow definition developed for the London ASB Strategy, the subjectivity inherent in the concept of ASB makes measurement problematic. There is inevitably a subjective element to determining what kinds of incidents amount to ASB, because incidents that can cause serious 'harassment, alarm or distress' to one individual may be of little concern to another. In many cases there is also, clearly, great scope for discretion in determining whether incidents call for criminal prosecution (and are therefore better described as 'crime' than 'ASB') as opposed to an ASB response. The cumulative nature of so much ASB also makes measurement difficult. Very often, minor incidents of misbehaviour have a serious effect on the victims because of their corrosive effects over time. In such cases, is it appropriate to label each individual incident as an incident of ASB?

Taking into account these difficulties of measurement, we decided that as part of our work to develop a general picture of ASB in London for this study, we would look at workload statistics relating to ASB for key agencies in London. We used various sources of statistics:

- London findings of the Home Office one-day count of ASB reports
- Metropolitan Police CADMIS data
- Metropolitan Police Service recorded crime data on certain types of offence
- London Fire Brigade data on malicious fires

The Metropolitan Police and London Fire Brigade data used here have been analysed by GOL analysts for the London Crime and Disorder Audit (GOL, 2004).¹⁰ We have drawn extensively on the GOL analysis.

The Home Office one day count of ASB

A national one-day count of ASB was conducted on 10 September 2003 (see Home Office, 2003a; 2004).¹¹ For the day count, relevant statutory and voluntary agencies collated reports from the public about ASB incidents of various kinds,¹² and submitted the data to the Home Office. The findings of the day count clearly have their limitations: in particular, there are the problems of unreported incidents and repeat reports, and

¹⁰ Further analysis was done by Mike Hough and Nick Tilley.

¹¹ See also www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/antisocialbehaviour/daycount/index.html.

¹² In advance of the day count, the Home Office had developed a grid identifying the range of ASB issues to be included in the day count. There were four main headings: misuse of public space; disregard for community/personal well-being; acts directed at people; and environmental damage.

seasonal factors are not taken into account. However, the count does provide an indication of the level of demand on agencies that arises from ASB.

On the day of the count, a total of 66,107 ASB incidents were recorded across England and Wales. Extrapolating from these figures, it is estimated that there are approximately 16.5 million reports per year.¹³ Based on these figures and research into the 'unit cost' of ASB incidents,¹⁴ it is estimated that the total annual cost of ASB incidents is around £3.4 billion.

In the London region, just under 13,000 ASB incidents – about 20 per cent of the total – were recorded on the day of the Home Office count. The breakdown of these reports is shown in Table 4.1. From the table, we can see that over half (54%) of reported incidents related to environmental ASB; this figure includes reports about rubbish/litter, criminal damage/vandalism, noise and vehicle nuisance. Based on the day count figures, it is estimated that over 3 million ASB incidents are reported in London annually.

¹³ This figure is a cautious estimate, based on a 250-day year.

¹⁴ The framework for assessing the costs of ASB was developed by Whitehead *et al*, who note that in practice, measuring the costs of ASB 'involves fundamental difficulties of definition, measurement and interpretation' (2003: 47).

Table 4.1: ASB reports (%) in London under the Home Office one-day count

Type of ASB incident	Percentage of reports
Rubbish/litter	17
Criminal damage/vandalism	16
Noise	11
Vehicle nuisance	10
All environmental ASB	54
Nuisance	9
Rowdy behaviour	8
Begging	6
Abandoned vehicles	6
Harassment	6
Drugs/substance misuse	5
Prostitution	2
Animals	2

Computer-aided dispatch management information system (CADMIS)^{15,16}

CADMIS is a valuable – but underused – source of information about ASB. The majority of incidents coming to police attention are reported to them over the phone – and thus result in a CADMIS record – but only a minority result in a crime report. CADMIS data probably can provide the best available information about the distribution and nature of ASB that comes to official attention in London.

In the three years to March 31 2004 the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) recorded just over 23 million incidents which were dealt with by CADMIS.^{17,18} Of these, it has been calculated (GOL, 2004) that just under 2.5 million (11 per cent) related to ASB. Based on the categories identified in the London ASB Strategy, almost three-quarters (73 per cent) involved ASB that restricted people’s use of public space, the rest being interpersonal/malicious ASB (15 per cent) and environmental ASB (12 per cent). Clearly this distribution of incidents says as much about the sorts of ASB that Londoners regard as ‘police business’ as it does about the overall nature and prevalence of ASB.

Between 2001/02 and 2002/03, interpersonal/malicious ASB fell by 12 per cent before increasing slightly the following year. Similarly, ASB restricting access to public space first went down by nine per cent before increasing by six per cent the year after.

¹⁵ The CADMIS system records all incidents resulting from premise alarms; direct contact at police stations (in person or by telephone); 999 emergency calls and via radio (either via the police themselves or security systems).

¹⁶ The CADMIS data were filtered to include only borough incidents. It should be noted that, like offence data, there is variation between the number of incidents reported and those ultimately recorded. Presently the MPS has no operational system to monitor or flag ASB within the CRIS or CADMIS systems. A CADMIS record can comprise up to three different incident codes, and as a result we were unable to determine the extent of multiple recording.

¹⁷ It was not possible to determine if the number of incidents was affected by deployment policies and/or resource availability.

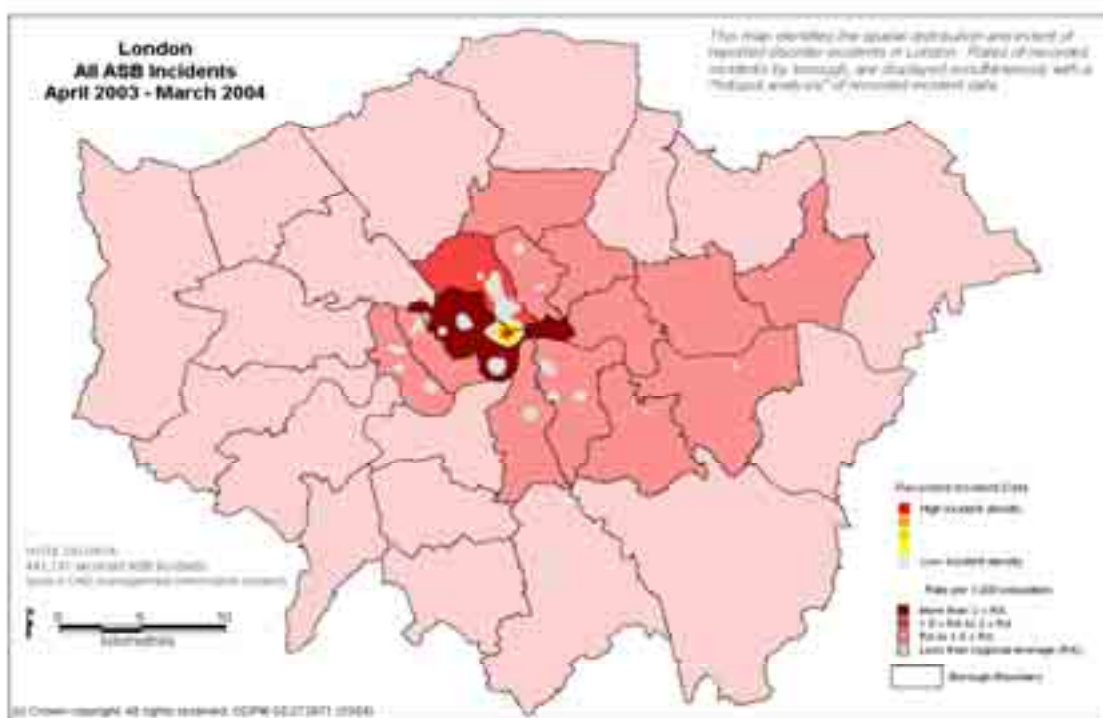
¹⁸ It should be noted that the CADMIS database is a live system which is routinely and retrospectively updated.

Environmental ASB, however, dropped throughout – by almost a third (32 per cent). Whether these trends reflect real changes is hard to say. ASB has become a higher priority, which is likely to have stimulated fuller recording. On the other hand, the fall in abandoned vehicles and environmental disorder may well reflect recent successes in efforts to tackle these problems in London.

Disorder and ASB hotspots

Figure 4.2 shows that MPS ASB incidents were concentrated across the inner boroughs with the highest densities in Westminster (mainly public space ASB) and Camden.

Figure 4.2: Total disorder and ASB MPS CADMIS dispatches for 2003/04



MPS recorded offences of criminal damage

Some complaints about ASB result not only in a CADMIS record but also in a crime report – where it is clear to the police that the complainant is alleging that a criminal incident has occurred. The most common category of crime associated with ASB is criminal damage, or vandalism. The MPS recorded just over 439,000 criminal damage offences in London between 2000/01 and 2002/03. Clearly this will reflect only a small minority of the totality of offences *committed*: as the British Crime Survey shows, most incidents of criminal damage go unreported to the police, and unrecorded by them as crimes.

Just under half (47 per cent) of recorded offences of criminal damage related to vehicles and just over a quarter (27 per cent) related to people's homes. The remainder involved commercial premises (16 per cent) and 'other criminal damage' (11 per cent). Overall recorded offences decreased slightly (two per cent) over the period, though there was a nine per cent fall for commercial premises. Westminster (the West End / Soho area)

comprised a notable hotspot with less intense local hotspots found in most other boroughs. However, criminal damage offences were more likely to be reported in affluent areas.

MPS and London Fire Brigade (LFB) data

Arson is another category of recorded crime associated with ASB. The MPS recorded 18,118 arson offences across London in the three years to March 31 2003. Almost half (46 per cent) the arson cases involved motor vehicles, followed by residential properties, accounting for 21 per cent. If the police statistics are a guide, arson represents a minority of fires coming to official attention: the LFB recorded a total of 65,000 fires over two years to March 31 2003; just under a third (29 per cent) were to buildings and just over a quarter (26 per cent) to mobile property, (eg motor vehicles). The remaining 45 per cent were accounted for by call-outs to 'other locations' (ie outdoor structures and rubbish). In addition, just under 21,000 malicious false alarms were recorded. Over the three years the number of arson offences recorded by the MPS increased slightly (three per cent), whilst LFB data showed a fall of 17 per cent (from 47,000 to 39,000 incidents) across the two-year period.¹⁹

Both arson and malicious fires occurred most often over weekends, and most typically in the afternoons and evenings. These incidents were most concentrated in the central and eastern parts of the city, with hotspots in Tower Hamlets and across the Hackney border (see GOL, 2004 for more detail).

Factors driving ASB reports

The patterns of ASB reporting described in this chapter may in part reflect changes and variations in reporting and recording practices. Numbers of ASB reports do not simply reflect underlying rates of ASB. Levels of concern about specific behaviours and levels of tolerance may vary across time and by area. The willingness of the public to report ASB incidents will also partly reflect their expectations that the relevant agencies will respond to the reports, or have the necessary powers and capacity to respond effectively. The recording practices of agencies vary, and may reflect their priorities at a given time. Compared to our understanding of the factors that affect the reporting and recording of *crime*, our understanding of the construction of most official statistics that relate to ASB is rudimentary.

For the present, all we can say with any certainty is that as agencies place greater priority to ASB, Londoners' tolerance of ASB is likely to decline, and their preparedness to report incidents – whether to neighbourhood wardens, to neighbourhood-based policing teams or to the better established police and local authority channels – will rise. Disentangling these trends in reporting and recording of incidents from the underlying trends will remain problematic. To be optimistic, the focus on ASB should in time begin to depress ASB trends. On the other hand, there are countervailing pressures, such as initiatives to

¹⁹ However, this trend was not uniform across the capital with some areas showing large increases (Tower Hamlets, 79 per cent) while others recorded sharp decreases (Hackney, 29 per cent).

²⁰ See Farrington and Coid (2003).

promote the night-time economy. One thing is clear: more energy and effort is needed to develop good indices of ASB.

5 Local responses to anti-social behaviour

Across London, the borough-based crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRPs) have responsibility for identifying and tackling local problems of ASB. Under the national strategy on ASB, every CDRP is now required to audit the extent of ASB in its area and to include specific ASB priorities in its crime and disorder strategy. Each CDRP is also required to identify an individual who has responsibility for co-ordinating work on ASB. Within London, funding for full-time ASB co-ordinator posts has been made available to all CDRPs through the Government Office for London.

As part of this study, and to fulfil our aim of setting the context for the London ASB Strategy, we initially intended to chart the work that the 33 London CDRPs are currently undertaking in relation to ASB. However, we found that the breadth and diversity of local ASB work was so great that it simply was not feasible to carry out an overview within the time-frame of this study. Additionally, it proved extremely difficult to identify and categorise local ASB initiatives, because so many of these are closely interlinked with, or indeed are part and parcel of, wider crime initiatives.

We therefore decided that we would explore local responses to ASB by focussing primarily on the work of three specific boroughs. We selected three boroughs which, between them, were grappling with a variety of ASB problems and served to illustrate a range of approaches. The three boroughs cover very different areas of London, namely:

- Borough A: mixed residential and commercial inner-London, including both deprived and smaller, affluent neighbourhoods
- Borough B: deprived inner-London
- Borough C: relatively affluent outer-London.

We reviewed audit, strategy and action plan documentation produced by the three boroughs, in order to explore the tactics and structures they deploy in tackling ASB. In addition, we looked at how the three boroughs define ASB, and set this in the context of a review of ASB definitions across all London CDRPs.

Local definitions of ASB

Many CDRPs refer to the Crime and Disorder Act definition of ASB – behaviour ‘that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as [the perpetrator]’ – in their strategy documents. Some acknowledge that there is a certain amount of definitional confusion when it comes to ASB. For the most part, CDRPs also highlight the specific issues that they are seeking to tackle under the heading of ASB.

Table 5.1 shows the main themes that emerge in the local classifications of ASB. Many other issues are cited by smaller numbers of CDRPs; these range from violence/assault, vehicle theft and joy-riding to untidy gardens, riding on footpaths, urination in the street and homelessness. Clearly, the issues that are cited as ASB by the CDRPs vary widely,

although there is also a lot of overlap in terms of issues such as graffiti, noise, abandoned vehicles and alcohol/drug problems.

Table 5.1 ASB themes mentioned by the London CDRPs

Issue	No. of mentions*	Issue	No. of mentions*
Graffiti	23	Criminal damage	11
Noise problems	22	Fly-tipping	11
Abandoned vehicles	21	Abusive/rowdy behaviour	10
Alcohol/drug issues	21	Domestic incidents/violence	10
Litter/rubbish	16	Disturbance in/around licensed premises	9
Vandalism	16	Dog fouling	9
Disturbance/ASB in public places (eg prostitution, begging etc)	13	Teenagers/groups hanging around	9
Racial incidents	13	Disturbance in private	6

*Due to the difficulty of accessing all relevant CDRP documentation, these figures are not necessarily out of a total of 33 CDRPs.

Most of the specific ASB issues mentioned by CDRPs fall within the London strategy definition of ASB: these are problems that are serious enough to merit a response by the authorities, without being so serious as to necessarily demand criminal prosecution. However, many CDRPs also incorporate issues of more serious criminality within their ASB definitions. For example, incidents of racial and domestic violence are not infrequently mentioned, as are drugs and vehicle offences that fall towards the serious end of the criminal spectrum. This suggests that the variety in local classifications of ASB not only reflects the variety in local concerns, but also reflects differences in opinion about what *kinds* of problems should be addressed through ASB initiatives. Such differences in opinion are, perhaps, inevitable – given the all-encompassing nature of the Crime and Disorder Act definition of ASB.

The three boroughs examined in more detail for this study all refer to noise, criminal damage, drugs problems and vehicle-related problems in describing local ASB issues. They also highlight a wide range of other issues, as listed in the text boxes below. These issues range from relatively minor problems to serious crime: for example, Borough B mentions various forms of violence and criminal activity including burglary; Borough C refers to ‘hate crime’. All three boroughs note that there are high levels of public concern with local ASB problems. Boroughs A and C both directly quote the Crime and Disorder Act definition of ASB, with C also noting that there is no single, agreed definition of the concept.

Borough A: ASB issues

'Anti-social behaviour comes in many guises and forms causing great distress to many, but it is difficult to measure as incidents frequently go unreported.' Examples of ASB identified in the borough's literature include:

- drugs (open use of drugs and discarding of drugs paraphernalia)
- noise nuisance
- graffiti
- vandalism
- criminal damage
- verbal abuse
- engaging in threatening behaviour in large groups
- smoking and drinking alcohol while under-age
- harassment (racial, homophobic, domestic violence)
- vehicle crime/joyriding
- throwing missiles
- fireworks
- noisy neighbours
- disorder in parks and open spaces: bench drinking, youth disorder, illicit sexual activity
- disorder around licensed premises
- anti-social street activity: people sleeping rough, street drinking, begging, street-based sex work

Borough B: ASB issues

'Anti-social behaviour includes unlawful activities such as street disorder, noise nuisance, fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles and fear of crime.' The following aspects of ASB are highlighted:

- violence: all forms including verbal and physical abuse
- harassment: motivated by the victim's race, sexual orientation, age, disability, faith
- domestic violence
- criminal activity including burglary, drug dealing or using somewhere for unlawful purposes
- vandalism including graffiti and damage to property
- noise nuisance: high levels; unreasonable hours; persistent basis
- fly-tipping
- dog fouling
- uncontrolled pets
- dangerous parking
- abandoned vehicles

Borough C: ASB issues

'Although many types of anti-social or disorderly behaviour may not necessarily constitute a crime, it is the kind of low-level, persistent disturbance that can severely impact on the quality of life in local communities.'

'Some [types of ASB] are criminal, whilst others are sub-criminal. They highlight the fact that such behaviour is not the responsibility of one agency...'

The following are described as examples of ASB:

- noise
- unkempt gardens (dumping of goods, creating 'eyesores')
- criminal behaviour
- verbal abuse
- intimidating gatherings of young people in public spaces
- damage to property including graffiti; vandalism
- nuisance from vehicles including parking, abandonment
- rubbish dumping and misuse of communal areas
- aggressive begging
- alcohol and solvent abuse
- prostitution
- uncontrolled pets and animals
- harassment including racial and homophobic; all hate crime
- intimidation
- nuisance from business use
- riding/cycling on footpaths
- using and selling drugs

Local structures for dealing with ASB

As we have noted above, each CDRP is required to have an ASB co-ordinator with responsibility for co-ordinating work on ASB, and to include specific priorities relating to ASB within its crime and disorder strategy. Within this broad framework, different CDRPs have different structures for developing and implementing the ASB work that is carried out on the ground.

Crime and disorder strategies are generally organised around a small number of broad strategic objectives. The theme of ASB – encompassing, as it does, so many specific concerns and issues – often cross-cuts strategic objectives. For example, there are specific mentions of ASB or ASB-focussed actions under the four core priorities of the Borough A strategy: growing up safely; living safely; enjoying leisure and nightlife; safer town centres. ASB is also a theme that cross-cuts the four priorities in the Borough C strategy: reducing youth crime and disorder; making our community safer; crimes against people; and dealing with drug and alcohol offending and offenders.

Some CDRP structures include specific working groups or units that are dedicated to action on ASB. Borough A, for example, contains an ASB Action Group which is based in the local authority housing department and works closely with the police and other agencies. This group focuses particularly on the use of ASBOs to target drug abuse. However, activities aimed at reducing ASB in Borough A extend far beyond the work of the Action Group. Other projects that have a particular focus on ASB in the borough include the street warden service, which aims to provide reassurance and improve the street environment and community safety; and a town centre management scheme which is seeking to reduce problems of crime and ASB in commercial areas.

While this is not a requirement from national government, some CDRPs have produced separate ASB strategies in addition to their broader crime and disorder strategies. The local authority Housing Directorate in Borough C has developed an ASB strategy which is intended to contribute to the attainment of the crime and disorder strategy objectives. It is made clear in the ASB strategy that responsibility for undertaking action against ASB does not fall to a single body, but lies with a wide range of local authority units and departments, as well as external statutory and voluntary agencies. Within the local authority, the Housing Directorate calls on local housing officers and caretakers, one-stop shops, racial harassment officers, legal services, environmental health, social services and education, among others, to work with them in order to 'ensure a seamless approach towards tackling the problems associated with anti-social activities'. Effective partnership with external agencies – including the police, probation, drug support agencies, the mediation service, victim support and the race equality council – is also deemed a crucial element of work on ASB.

Local tactics for addressing ASB

Whatever structures are in place for ASB work, the specific tactics that are used by CDRPs in addressing ASB tend to be wide-ranging. This is no surprise, given the vast array of issues that are identified as ASB by the CDRPs. Moreover, because boundaries are often not drawn between ASB and serious crime, and because of the close relationship between ASB problems and other community and social welfare concerns, many ASB actions are almost completely submerged within broader community safety work. Hence, even if some CDRPs place a greater emphasis on certain kinds of ASB initiatives rather than on others, most partnerships adopt a genuinely multi-dimensional approach to ASB. They tend to engage in work of all kinds: for example, from targeted enforcement to educational activity; from early intervention work to community engagement.

Boroughs A, B and C are no exception to this general rule. All three CDRPs undertake various enforcement and preventive activities in combination in their efforts to tackle ASB – as is illustrated in the accounts of some key elements of their work provided in the boxes below.

Borough A: ASB tactics

In Borough A, the following are all described as necessary elements of effective work against ASB:

- early intervention
- encouraging the public to report ASB incidents and offences
- effective information sharing within the partnership
- community involvement
- support for victims
- making places less vulnerable to crime
- assisting vulnerable communities
- deterring offenders
- assisting ex-offenders

In more specific terms, initiatives that have been developed with the aim of reducing ASB include the following:

- The use of ASBOs to tackle drug dealing and usage.
- Dog patrols in certain areas of the borough.
- Provision of additional officers for community policing.
- The targeting of crime motivated by religious hatred.
- The provision of improved lighting and security around train stations.
- Tackling intimidating behaviour in entertainment venues.
- Sure Start programmes encompassing preventive and early intervention work.
- The development of services for young people at risk of offending and their families, for example Youth Inclusion Programmes.
- Initiatives to bring together the CDRP, business and community representatives.

Borough B: ASB tactics

Work being undertaken in Borough B to tackle ASB includes:

- The adoption of a consensual approach, involving the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Contracts, to curb ASB among problem youths.
- Provision of victim support
- Joint working with residents
- Use of mediation services
- Introduction of a neighbourhood warden providing an out-of-hours presence on volatile housing estates
- Development of 24-hour reporting facilities enabling victims or agencies to report incidents
- Implementation of a communications strategy to raise the profile of local work on

ASB

To ensure that the partnership itself works in an integrated and cohesive manner, it is committed to:

- Regular updating of procedures.
- Reviews of all actions and initiatives through the ASB Review Board.
- Provision of regular training courses for staff.
- Developing an integrated information system on ASB involving the police and local authority.

Borough C: ASB tactics

The Borough C ASB strategy is based on the principles of prevention, enforcement and reintegration/resettlement. This approach encompasses consideration for the victim, offender and location. Specific tactics include:

- Encouraging more reporting of ASB incidents
- Expanding use of early mediation, eg through: informal street consultation with youngsters
- Adoption of situational measures, eg improved lighting and anti-graffiti paint
- Use of ASBOs and parenting orders for persistent offenders
- Improved support for victims and witnesses
- Public consultation on ASB in hotspot areas
- Promotion of neighbourhood watch activities
- Provision of improved facilities for cyclists/motorcyclists
- Reassurance policing in designated areas (involving additional police patrols and a focus on problems such as graffiti, vandalism, alcohol-related disorder, vandalism on buses and retail crime)

6 Conclusions

This study has highlighted the great range of ASB issues that cause concern to Londoners. We have found – particularly through our focus group work – that ASB can affect the day-to-day lives of Londoners in a wide variety of ways. The more serious forms of ASB, it seems, can cause real offence and fear; and can stop people getting on with their lives in the way that they want to. The survey data we have reported on here also suggest that Londoners' experiences or perceptions of ASB can be linked to fear of crime, and to a general sense of dissatisfaction with their neighbourhoods.

On the other hand, the survey data also indicate that for a majority of Londoners, ASB is not an issue of overwhelming concern, and does not prevent them from feeling reasonably content with where they live. The focus group findings suggest that in its less serious manifestations, ASB can cause irritation, annoyance and upset without necessarily having a major impact on the lives of those who experience it. It is also interesting to note that the distress caused by ASB may not simply result from the direct impact of the ASB actions on the victim, but also from the victim's *interpretation* of the actions as reflecting the perpetrator's lack of understanding, consideration or respect for others.

In a great deal of policy and media debate, problems of ASB are often explicitly or implicitly linked to children and young people. The findings of our study do indicate that ASB associated with children and young people – or behaviour by children or young people that is *perceived as* anti-social – is indeed an issue of special concern to many members of the public and agencies. However, we have also found that a great many ASB issues causing concern in London have no necessary connection to young people. In particular, many Londoners feel most disturbed about the various manifestations of environmental ASB – to which people from all backgrounds and of all ages can contribute, along with businesses, and the poor performance of agencies responsible for keeping areas clean and litter-free.

ASB, in all its guises, makes great demands on London's public services. As Londoners' calls for action on ASB have got louder, and the subject of ASB has risen ever higher on the political agenda, both statutory and voluntary agencies appear to have been dedicating increasing amounts of resources to dealing with it. It is clear that across London's 33 CDRPs, local agencies are engaged in a vast array of initiatives specifically targeting ASB. Moreover, the goal of tackling ASB now permeates most community safety work carried out by the local partnerships. This partly reflects definitional confusion about where the boundaries lie between ASB and crime. But it also reflects the fact that crime and (sub-criminal or non-criminal) ASB often have the same causes, and are often played out in the same arenas, by the same players.

The findings of this study have various implications for the development of the London ASB Strategy. Perhaps there are five key issues that need to be taken into account.

a) It is critically important that strategic work on ASB in London is based on a sound understanding of the differing levels and effects of ASB problems. This means

recognising that ASB can have devastating consequences for some individuals and communities; but also that there are many lesser forms of ASB that intrude on the lives of Londoners without necessarily causing enormous concern. The London strategy should promote *proportionate* and *tailored* responses to the wide range of behaviours that are anti-social.

b) The London ASB Strategy must avoid perpetuating stereotypes of young people and children as inherently troublesome or anti-social. While it is important to address problems of ASB that are caused by young people, a focus on these issues must not be allowed to divert attention from the many forms of ASB committed by adults; and the experiences of children and young people as victims of ASB must not be overlooked. The London strategy should also encourage relevant agencies to take a reflective approach to problems of ASB associated with young people. This entails actively addressing such questions as:

- What are the underlying causes of ASB committed by young people?
- How can we ensure that action to counter youth ASB helps to resolve rather than exacerbate the problems underlying the misbehaviour?
- To what extent do perceptions of youth ASB reflect the onlookers' fears and misunderstandings rather than genuine harms caused; and how can such perceptions be challenged?

c) ASB is by no means always intentional and malicious. Often it is a manifestation of ignorance, carelessness or thoughtlessness. Moreover, what one individual may deem to be ASB, another may regard as entirely reasonable behaviour: for example, with respect to noise or rowdy behaviour, different individuals or groups have very different levels of tolerance. In a city with a population as ethnically, culturally and economically diverse as London's, the scope for 'unintended' or 'unconscious' ASB is vast. As a regional framework for tackling ASB, the London strategy should thus support efforts to improve mutual understanding and communication within and between local communities. Clearly, tackling ASB is not simply a matter of stopping or inhibiting certain forms of behaviour, but is also about establishing relationships and trust between individuals and groups.

d) The above three points all incline us towards the same general conclusion: namely, that action on ASB, if it is to be effective, needs to balance enforcement with prevention. In order to strike the right balance, the London ASB Strategy needs to encourage sustainable programmes of action that involve long-term as well as short-term solutions, and to tackle the underlying causes of ASB as well as the symptoms. It is also crucial that where enforcement action against ASB perpetrators is employed, this is combined with the provision of support for the perpetrators, where this is needed to address the root causes of their behaviour. In the absence of support, enforcement may only have the effect of further marginalising those individuals who are already socially excluded – and hence make their involvement in ASB more rather than less likely.

Finally, it is also important to recognise that a phenomenon as highly diverse and complex as ASB demands diverse and flexible responses. Most of these responses are necessarily

provided at a local level, since local agencies are best placed to identify what needs to be addressed and how, and to carry out action on the ground. In this context, the role of a regional strategy should primarily be to support and facilitate the local action. In providing a regional framework of this kind, the London ASB Strategy needs to take into account the fact that the 33 London CDRPs are already carrying out a great deal of varied work that directly or indirectly focuses on ASB. Given the extent and scope of ASB-related activity, it cannot all be tracked or overseen by the London strategy. The strategy can, however, identify the ways in which the regional agencies can assist, advance and – where appropriate – supplement the local action.

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