



# Let's Talk About Antisocial Behaviour

On Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> February, we hosted a fishbowl discussion on antisocial behaviour as part of the Firestarter Festival. The discussion centred on how society and policy could view antisocial behaviour with a more compassionate, trauma-informed lens that accounts for and addresses the social determinants underlying behaviours and still supports victims. We discussed what 'pro-social' behaviour might look like, and how to move the discourse towards one that celebrates strengths rather than shortcomings.

Key discussion points included how young people are associated with antisocial behaviour even though current data demonstrates that adults are more likely to be involved. We also considered solutions, like the need for peer support within communities and investment in local universal preventative services like youth work and management of issues such as mental health and drug and alcohol use. Many of the participants also touched on the role that conflict resolution, mediation and restorative justice approaches could play in securing early resolution to issues.

The fishbowl took place at New Register House in Edinburgh, and 46 people attended. In the inner fishbowl we had David Bell from the Scottish Government, Dot Horne from 6VT, Fiona Alder from Fife Council, Superintendent Ian Thompson from Police Scotland, Mark Nicol from Wheatley Group, Niven Rennie from Police Scotland, Pete White from Positive Prison Positive Futures, Sheriff Frank Crowe from the Crown Office, and Professor Susan McVie, Chair of Quantitative Criminology at the University of Edinburgh. We also had many valuable contributions from those in the audience.

## Discussion

The discussion centred loosely around 4 prompts:

- 1. Why do we still talk about antisocial behaviour (ASB) when Scotland has an empowering, trauma informed, asset-based approach to policy?**
- 2. What does good look like in preventing and resolving ASB?**
- 3. How do we move the discourse to using more positive language about behaviour and have strengths-based conversations?**

4. Do we understand the determinants or underlying issues that can generate ASB; and are there different 'levers' we can pull to drive change?



### A community focus

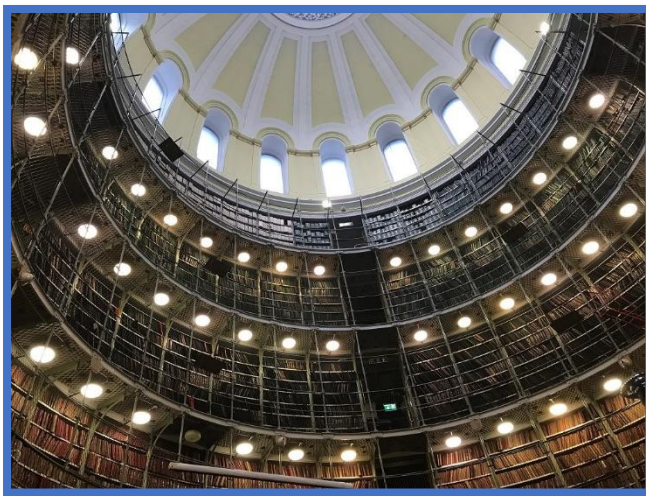
There is no concrete, stable definition of ASB from a policy or research perspective. In practice, it can mean anything from noise and neighbour disputes to vehicles being driven recklessly, to environmental issues such as littering and fly-tipping and graffiti. Generally, ASB issues are very important to communities and are often the ones that come top of the priority list for community safety partners and local elected members.

Pro-social behaviour, then, might refer to actions taken to improve communities. This may include behaviours and policy responses that are asset-based, trauma-informed and non-punitive. Some suggestions that were discussed include peer support within communities, community wardens and accessible training in topics like suicide awareness, mental health first aid and domestic violence. It is important to consider how these initiatives should or could fit within the public and third sectors, so that communities are not responsible for filling gaps caused by underdevelopment or deprivation. Moreover, addressing antisocial crimes through restorative justice within the community should focus on tasks or actions that are meaningful to the individual as well as the community itself.

The nature of ASB has evolved over the last few decades. Previously, complaints centred on noisy parties and young people. In recent years, ASB has become associated with poor mental health and is more likely to be perpetrated by adults. Like other forms of criminal activity, ASB is increasingly taking place online.

### **The social determinants of antisocial behaviour**

Poverty and deprivation is at the root of much behaviour considered antisocial. Structural issues like poor sound-proofing and housing problems are often underlying causes, requiring social rather than punitive solutions. The police are not best placed to address these issues, but they tend to be the service most involved.



Issues of poverty and deprivation have been exacerbated by austerity, with many vulnerable people unable to receive support. Essential services like youth work, addiction support and homelessness services are relegated to the third sector, which is in turn subjected to precarious funding and insecurity. This also means that it is difficult to retain experts within such fields. With cuts to non-statutory local government services, there are scarce resources to address ASB.

Participants discussed the judiciary are often the hardest 'sector' to move on this issue to take a non-punitive approach.

Many of the people seen as perpetrating ASB are also very vulnerable. Viewing them with compassion and empathy, rather than attributing stigma, is likely to help people receive support and reduce re-offending. In the same way that key statutory services like the police endeavour to provide a ['trauma-informed' service](#), perhaps society needs to be trauma-informed in responding to ASB or perceived ASB. The police view was that enforcement needs to be part of a wider plan aimed at combatting ASB and its determinants, with prison often not a sustainable, or just, solution.

### **Young people**

Youth crime has reduced over the past two decades, perhaps in line with changes to leisure patterns and young people spending more time indoors. Even though adults are more likely to be involved in ASB, the discourse continues to focus on young people.

When young people are involved in behaviours we deem unacceptable, they have historically been stigmatised through antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs). This paid

little attention to the social determinants of behaviours, like poverty and lack of resources within communities. Similarly, preventative and early intervention services like youth work have not been given enough esteem or funding, even though this work is critical to addressing ASB and other issues. Youth workers are often the only trusted adult in a young person's life. Some participants made the point that there is a lack of provision during a transition stage – from the 7+ age group into teens. Youth *crime* has fallen...but not the perception of young people being involved in ASB perhaps?

There was a sense in the discussion that adults need to take more responsibility for the social conditions that produce ASB in young people. Like adults involved in ASB, many have adverse childhood experiences. A structural, rather than individual, policy focus may help us to move forward. For example, young people engaging in 'ASB' might instead be thought of as young people navigating structural discrimination, deprivation and inequality.

## Takeaways from the fishbowl

### On the nature of ASB

- ASB has changed in recent years – from noisy neighbours to much more complex cases that really have their roots in mental health conditions but the behaviour manifests / is perceived to be antisocial. Other factors including the poor housing, lack of access to private green space play a role too. People also picked up that it has multiple components and is a result of societal failures.
- ASB does really matter to people – low-level, persistent impacts on people's lives. The legislation and other interventions have high thresholds however.

### On prevention and response

- There was a lot of discussion about the diminishing capacity to do the early intervention work.
- Facilitation in the community plays an important role. Fundamentally, people and services still don't really know what to do with people who don't 'conform' to particular standards/expectations of behaviour.
- Other points touched on were about people thinking about having to 'suppress' a 'problem'. The language is important here.
- A multi-sectoral, 'whole systems' approach is necessary to addressing ASB. Data-sharing is also helpful here to get a clear picture of the problem
- We should empower young people through youth work to hone the skills needed to empower others.
- Some people noted it's gone full circle: in 1980s restorative approaches were all the rage and now 2020...the conversation has (rightly) returned to these approaches.

## On opportunities and the future

- We need to keep discussing and keep listening
- We need to stop associating ASB with young people
- We need to better understand the drivers for this behaviour; including ASB in a digital environment which is not well-understood at the moment.
- Scottish Government could renew its legislation on ASB



Ideas 'cloud' from the discussions – major themes of interest

- Many people were intrigued by the concept of a prosocial community – what does this look like? What do partnerships, public services, interventions that supported a pro-social approach look like? *This is something SCSN would like to build on.*
- Many intergenerational opportunities were offered to challenge some of these perceptions; how can we integrate compassion and kindness into public policy and discourse. What do movements like the Kindness Innovation Network offer?

## Feedback

85% of respondents rated the value of the conversations as 4 or 5/5 stars.

85% of respondents rated the venue as 4 or 5/5 stars.

100% of respondents rated the event 4 or 5/5 stars.

The main 'takeaway' from the event was that antisocial behaviour is complex and requires a collaborative approach, along with one that understands why people behave in an 'antisocial' way in the first place. Some people felt that what 'pro-social' behaviour could look like in reality is still very elusive and it will take further discussion to define this.

There were some comments on the acoustics of the venue and on the type of perspectives that we heard on the day. We will take these on board.

Some comments:

---

*"A unique format but great way to have many voices and opinions included in a discussion topic"*

*"Bar one or two exceptions we heard entirely from people who enforce against anti-social behaviour (sheriffs, police) or who handle it as a problem (community groups, government) but very little from people who behave 'anti-socially'"*

*"Housing need to be included more and more [in the ASB discourse] as we as housing professionals see the individuals at their best, worst and most vulnerable"*

---

We also had a twitter # for the day, with 27 tweets and 18 retweets about the session reaching 19,335 accounts.

TWEETREACH SNAPSHOT FOR

# # LetsTalkASB

## ESTIMATED REACH

**19,335**

ACCOUNTS REACHED

## EXPOSURE

**36,068** IMPRESSIONS

