



Case Study on Family and Household Support Service – City of Edinburgh Council

July 2021

Introduction

The structure of community safety services and their officers has gone through a major overhaul in the last four years. The driver for this change was influenced by the Christie Commission Report 2011, to try and achieve greater prevention in anti-social behaviour (ASB) issues by creating a holistic service which focusses as much on providing support as pursuing enforcement. The service focusses on causality and how disruptive behaviour can be a manifestation of influential factors such as social inequality and personal trauma.

Situation

Supporting those participating and/or suffering due to ASB was previously dealt with by three different service areas within City of Edinburgh Council. Community Safety Officers handled ASB investigations, Housing Support Officers supported tenants and Family Support Officers worked with the family. These three services were relatively siloed but often dealt with the same people and households but for different presenting reasons. To offer a more holistic and preventative approach, it was felt that merging the three roles into one Family and Household Support Officer (FHSO) role

would be a more effective and resourceful alternative with a remit that extended beyond just responding to ASB, Noise and Nuisance behaviour to whole household support, where interventions were targeted to reduce and or prevent the behaviours from taking place.

Action

The new vision and culture change had full support from the corporate leadership, sending a positive message from above.

In order to create this new service, members of each of the previous teams had to re-apply and re-train for the new role.

The new FHSOs were given very comprehensive training and development in this new, more complex, holistic support. It was a collaborative approach built on three pillars of Practice; mediation approaches, restorative approaches and systemic practice. Importance was especially placed upon looking through a different lens at intentional and unintentional behaviours. FHSOs had access to SWIFT (social work record system) to establish where there may have been previous statutory social work support or intervention for unrelated issues.

The new service was structured around 4 Locality teams, managed by 12 Team Leaders.

The FHSOs were allocated to work during day hours and the Night Noise Team to work at night.

Outcome

Support was given to families/households in a holistic and trauma-informed way, with families only having to deal with one, consistent person. The FHSO was the one contact and conduit for referrals and multi-agency support e.g. GP, school, benefits support, substance use support.

Having only one person dealing with the same family or household, rather than multiple agencies, not only resulted in a consistent source of support for the family/household but also reduced bureaucracy, need to share information and ability for the officer to support various issues at once.

A culture change was created where FHSOs were not uniformed and efforts went into change of language, terminology as well as attitudinal shifts, such as moving away from 'victim' and 'perpetrator', or those who are 'deserving' and 'undeserving'

Numbers of complaints reduced and long-term progress ("breaking the cycle") has seen significant improvement.

There has been a massive shift in understanding and response to managing noise complaints (which were 70% of all referrals received) after working hard to better understand the cause of noise, where not assessed as intentional, but rather linked to mental health, addiction and chaotic lifestyles. The service now routinely links in with other partners and agencies including GPs, Education and Police Scotland.

Reflection

This was a huge culture change for all the services involved, especially community safety who had focussed more on enforcement and punitive action in the past. It took a long time to shape and encourage existing staff and as important to bring new staff into the roles and immersed in the 'vision' without resistance. On reflection, there should have been a greater focus and commitment to 'selling the vision' from the start and ensuring only those committed to the new approach were appointed, as to ensure all were invested and believed in the approach.

A six month lead-in would be advisable to ensure there is time to do the groundwork; that all policies and procedures are fully in place and reflect the change to ethos, approach and culture before launching the service. If appointing new staff ensure suitable time for recruitment and staff training and professional development.

The FHSO and Night Noise Team have given great feedback about how the new approach works and 'feel they are making a difference' and are more engaged themselves in the work.

It is a massive change and takes a great deal of stamina, energy and discipline to see it through, but it was worth it.

Contact Details

Author – Dawn Exley (SCSN) – dawn.exley@scsn.org.uk

Interviewee – Shirley McLaren, Community Safety Manager

Shirley.McLaren@edinburgh.gov.uk

Interviewee - Jon Ferrer, Senior Manager Quality, Governance and Regulation

Jon.Ferrer@edinburgh.gov.uk
