

Item No. 5	Classification: Open	Date: February 2023	Meeting name: Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission
Report title:		Impact of cost of living crisis on anti-social behaviour in Southwark.	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		Residents living in Council properties and block - Borough-wide	
From:		Anju Sidhu Head of Regulatory Services	

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission is asked to note the contents of this report. The report outlines the role of the Southwark Anti-Social Behaviour Service and the work that is being undertaken in response to the cost of living crisis.

BACKGROUND

2. Southwark's Anti-Social Behaviour Service (SASBU) was established in 2000 to target anti-social behaviour (ASB) from residents living in Council housing stock.
3. The main purpose of the team is to detect and deter serious cases of ASB as well as promote safety, health and wellbeing of our residents.
4. SASBU puts victims and witnesses at the centre of case management and works in partnership with internal and external agencies, including the voluntary sector to secure the best outcomes for our communities impacted by poor behaviour. Where appropriate SASBU will take legal action to protect Southwark's communities.

SASBU SERVICE

5. The service sits within Regulatory Services under the Neighbourhood and Nuisance Service. The service is made up of eleven officers and the officers provide a comprehensive witnessing support, intervention and enforcement service.
6. We receive on average, over 800 requests for SASBU service each year. Our main priorities include :
 - Reducing the impact of ASB and sub criminal behaviour within communities.
 - Targeting high risk case work through intelligence led interventions, community reporting and partnership working.
 - Empowering communities to deal with ASB through Community engagement including of ward panels, Tenants and Resident Meetings and resident Forums.

7. Currently, a majority of reports of ASB are made to the Council via the online reporting tool and Customer Contact Centre. These are triaged by experienced SASBU officers and categorised as follows;

Category one	High risk cases – Handled by SASBU A case officer in SASBU will visit or call the reporter within 24 hours of receiving the report; cases may include hate-related incidents, physical violence or threats of violence, harassment, intimidation or threatening behaviour, premises of disorder.
Category two	Medium risk cases – Handled by the Case Officer. The above housing officer will write (email/letter), visit or call within three working days. Examples may include misuse of public spaces, domestic, vandalism, garden nuisance, drug taking in communal areas.
Category three	Low risk cases – Handled by the Case Officer. The housing officer will write (email/letter), visit or call within five working days. Examples may include graffiti, fly tipping, fly posting.

ENFORCEMENT POWERS

8. SASBU's enforcement powers range from warning letters, acceptable behaviour contracts and community protection warnings and notices to injunctions, closure orders and tenancy possession, as well as supporting on applications for criminal behaviour orders. The Service uses powers under :
- The Housing Act 1996
 - The Crime and Disorder Act 1998
 - The Human Rights Act 1998
 - The Equality Act 2010
 - The Antisocial Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014:
9. In 2020 there were changes to tenancy possession due to the Covid-19 pandemic and as a result in 2020/21, SASBU saw more applications for injunctions and legislation premises closure orders. A total of 61 premises closures were made and 35 applications for injunctions were successfully made. The service supported multiple departments to find solutions to behaviour's which also included re-housing solutions.

IMPACT OF COST OF LIVING

10. Research has shown that during and since the pandemic years there has been an increase in ill-health especially around mental health and anti-social behaviour. The findings resonate with what we are seeing in Southwark.

SASBU has seen a sharp increase in service requests.

11. Since 2020, after the easing of the first lockdown, SASBU has continued to support case resolutions and interventions in violence against vulnerable residents. Majority of these cases are related to drug debts and grooming.
12. Council data and SASBU's experience suggests they are only just starting to see the impact of the cost of living crisis. Officers predict that around May 2023 we will see a direct impact of the crisis on case work. At present, we have seen a rise in substance misuse complaints, cuckooing of vulnerable residents and complaints which have a mental health and dual diagnosis element. Our main areas of concerns are;
 - a) **Poor mental health**- It is reported and current experience supports this, that poor mental health and substance misuse will increase. It is also known that when money is less available, vulnerable members of the community can fall back in to substance misuse and addiction and that drug debts can increase.
 - b) **Cuckooing** - We are likely to see an increase rise in cuckooing cases as more vulnerable residents struggle with day to day living.
 - c) **Noise Nuisance**- We also anticipate a rise in noise cases and large gathering at peoples' homes for more 'parties'. Unlicensed Music Events may become more frequent as events at friends and families homes are cheaper to attend and hold. Regulatory Services experienced this in the pandemic and it is likely this behaviour may resume during the cost of living crisis.
 - d) **Youth ASB** - We also believe that youth ASB will increase. During the pandemic, we saw a reduction in youth ASB reports however, during austerity from 2010, we saw an increase. SASBU's experience and data suggests there may be an increase in children and young adults being exposed to grooming and modern day slavery linked to county lines.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

13. We are currently reviewing our service and working with our key stakeholders to ensure the service is fit for purpose to address the challenges outlined above. We are currently ;
 - a) **Redesigning and reshaping** the Service to identify in service gaps. Area based data led and intelligence reviews are being carried out. SASBU has operated on ward areas with dedicated officers for specific wards. This has allowed us to build on community trust and support and have keys officers aligned to key services.
 - b) **Area based reviews** using Council and Police intelligence to ensure effective targeting of resources and problem solving. We will commence from April 2023 and be held under a new Terms of Reference as well as established information sharing agreements. It is anticipated that these meetings will assist in focusing on areas of higher crime and ASB for a partnership resolution, but to also reach out to communities where there is significant under reporting.

- c) **Tenant Management Organisations review of ASB process.** SASBU is working closely with the Tenant Management Team to further embed the ASB policy and procedure work within our communities to ensure a streamlined approach to case management. There is to be refreshed training for all Tenant Management Organisations, Joint Management Board Leathermarket, CO-OP estates pre April 2023 delivered by SASBU.
- d) **Recruited an ASB Officer** to work directly with the Councils Supported Housing Team. From March 2023, SASBU will work closely with the insourced units and the Supported Housing staff and residents to address and reduce ASB/crime linked to the units. We will also target our resources to working with small cohort of residents to deter them from ASB. Our role is to support residents to a healthier lifestyle and an eventual move on to more settled accommodation, including within the private sector.
- e) **Support for witnesses, victims and perpetrators** who experience mental ill health. Due to volume and complexity of the issues that SASBU deals with it chairs the dedicated Community Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). The MARAC provides a forum for professionals to work towards a solution focused resolution for contentious high risk community cases.
- f) **Recruiting Social Worker** to work alongside SASBU. We recently secured funding for a Social Worker that specialises in dual diagnosis (mental health and substance misuse). This is a new role within the Service will support work officers in cases whereas mental health is a key issue.
- g) **Extending service** to deal with high risk cases in the private rented sector to support the property licensing across Southwark. SASBU is working with the private sector housing team to further embed positive and healthy living environments for all of Southwark communities, this also includes houses of multiple occupation.

NEXT STEPS

- 14. The past three years have been challenging for the service and we have identified opportunities for better working and engagement with stakeholder's residents. SASBU is well versed for the daily challenges that are present in our communities.
- 15. We do anticipate a rise in ASB as seen in the pandemic when on occasion, we saw rises of over 100% in reports. We believe this will be linked to drugs and substance supply and misuse, mental ill health, youth ASB and potentially more cases of aggression.
- 16. The Head of Service is keen to build on the good work and practices in the service. To ensure sound continuity of service and business assurance, a review of the service is taking place to identify challenges to service delivery, opportunities and priorities.

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Anju Sidhu	
Report Author	Anju Sidhu	
Version	1	
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Key Decision?	Yes/No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Governance	Yes/No	Yes/No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes/No	Yes/No
List other officers here		
Cabinet Member	Yes/No	Yes/No
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