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BUILDING A SAFE, JUST
AND TOLERANT SOCIETY

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts addressing antisocial behaviour in the London Borough of Islington

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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy).

Foreword

Antisocial behaviour has increasingly become a matter of public concern. Just over a third of respondents in the 2000 British Crime Survey (BCS) said at least one of the eight types of social and physical disorder listed had a negative impact on their quality of life (Budd and Sims, 2001). Antisocial behaviour covers a broad range of acts ranging from loutish and intimidating behaviour to low-level offending. This behaviour is often repeated over a period of time and can depress people's pride and confidence in their communities, contributing to a sense of fear and vulnerability.

The importance of antisocial behaviour has been reflected in recent government legislation. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) to protect the public from behaviour that causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress, and their use was streamlined in the Police Reform Act 2002. ASBOs have also been supplemented by non-statutory Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) with guidance and good practice examples published by the Home Office in November 2002 which draw on the findings and recommendations of this piece of research. In addition, tackling antisocial behaviour is one of the Government's four key national policing priorities.

This report describes the impact of a scheme, based in the London Borough of Islington, designed to reduce antisocial behaviour using Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs). It also examines the subsequent use of ABCs in England and Wales. The research shows that ABCs have proved a popular way of addressing antisocial behaviour and that, in Islington, ABCs can reduce the amount of antisocial behaviour committed by young people for the duration of their contract. The evaluation in Islington found that children on ABCs were less likely to engage in antisocial behaviour, less likely to be stopped or arrested by the police and were less likely to commit criminal acts.

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Executive summary and recommendations

Background

This report describes:

- The impact of a scheme, based in the London Borough of Islington, designed to reduce antisocial behaviour using Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) over two periods, January 1999 to October 2000 and May 2001 to December 2001.
- The spread in usage of ABCs in England and Wales.

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) are written agreements between a young person, the local housing office or Registered Social Landlord (RSL) and the local police in which the person agrees not to carry out a series of identifiable behaviours which have been defined as antisocial. The contracts are primarily aimed at young people aged between ten and 18, but they can be used for adults, and a variation of the scheme has been developed for children under ten.

The research

The findings are based on a range of qualitative and quantitative data which include:

- Police and housing data for 95 children placed on the ABC scheme in Islington between 1999-2001.
- Background data from education welfare officers and schools in Islington.
- Interviews and surveys with Islington police and housing officers.
- Participant observation of several training days hosted by Islington Antisocial Behaviour Team.
- Observation of 28 ABC interviews held in Islington.
- A survey of children placed on the ABCs in Islington and their parents.
- A survey of 42 police forces in England and Wales and a sample of 190 local authorities.

Impact of the ABC scheme in Islington

- In Islington, for the first six months of the contract, fewer of the young people came to the attention of the police and housing officers for antisocial behaviour than in the previous six months (62% prior to contract and 43% during contract). The overall number of antisocial acts committed by young people in Islington also decreased whilst on contract (from 164 to 80 antisocial acts).
- There appeared to be fewer young people committing large numbers of antisocial acts whilst on contracts in Islington, although some of the young people continued to commit a range of antisocial acts while on the scheme.
- Some young people in Islington who had committed criminal offences in the six months prior to the contract continued to do so but at a reduced rate. (There were 85 arrests prior to the contracts and 34 arrests during).
- Forty-three per cent of the contracts in Islington were breached (40 out of 94). A total of 80 antisocial acts were committed by young people whilst on contract.
- There was a wide range in the number of times contracts were breached in Islington – 57 per cent of contracts were not breached (54 of 94), 18 were breached once (19%), 11 contracts were breached twice (12%), and a further 11 contracts were breached at least three times (12%).
- Police and housing officers in Islington were not always aware that contracts had been breached and there were some concerns that contracts were not enforced.

Prior to the contract in Islington

- In Islington, the young people had come to the attention of the police on average 1.7 times for antisocial behaviour in the six months before their contract started, they were also involved in a wide range of criminal behaviour e.g. burglary, vehicle and motorbike theft.
- The young people in Islington were involved in a wide range of antisocial behaviour prior to being put on a contract including, threatening and intimidating residents, graffiti and criminal damage.

Each young person committed an average of six different types of antisocial behaviour before being placed on the scheme.

- The average age of those on the contract in Islington was 16 but there was a wide range in the ages. Eighty-eight per cent of contracts were issued for males.
- In Islington, those on contract normally lived in council accommodation, which their family had normally lived in for more than 10 years. This suggests the tendency to commit antisocial behaviour is not linked to short length of tenancy.
- It was common for young people on contracts in Islington to come from large families with three or more children. Several households had two children on an ABC simultaneously.
- The young people had a range of social and familial problems and were known to a range of welfare services in Islington.
- The young people were likely to engage in antisocial behaviour at school, had often been excluded from school at least once and truanted regularly.
- Parents, practitioners and the young people involved in the scheme in Islington stated that antisocial behaviour was due to boredom or peer pressure.

Process and implementation details in Islington

- In total, 104 young people had been on the scheme in Islington between January 1999 - October 2000 and May 2001 – December 2001.
- Young people were most commonly identified for the Islington scheme from complaints to estate managers (96%), police stops (44%) and from police intelligence (36%).
- Practitioners in Islington tended to favour ABCs over ASBOs, and interviewing young people about their antisocial behaviour was considered by practitioners to be a constructive way of dealing with the problem.
- Contracts were usually six months in length and contained seven terms, on average.
- Contracts normally had terms covering not damaging property (85%), not verbally abusing residents or passers-by (85%) and not writing graffiti (76%).
- The terms of the contract were generally considered to be fair by practitioners involved in the Islington scheme.
- There were issues relating to the monitoring of the scheme in Islington, which included:
 - the amount of time and resources available to police and housing officers who were responsible for implementing the scheme on top of existing duties; and,
 - the problem of identifying those responsible for antisocial behaviour and the lack of intelligence to monitor and evaluate the scheme.
- The use of diversion schemes and provision of additional facilities to young people on the scheme was seen as important by parents and practitioners to reduce antisocial behaviour in Islington.
- Practitioners involved in the scheme saw the inter-agency aspect of the scheme as very important. Islington Antisocial Behaviour Team were charged with notifying all relevant agencies.
- Suggestions on how to improve the scheme in Islington included additional publicity and improved monitoring by a dedicated antisocial behaviour team (established May 2001).

ABCs in England and Wales

- In April 2002 there were at least 173 contract schemes in England and Wales and 39 of the 42 police forces surveyed had implemented at least one ABC scheme. A total of 1,868 contracts had been issued, an average of 11 contracts per scheme. However, it is likely the number of schemes and contracts issued has increased since then.
- A multi-agency approach was common usually involving the police, housing, Youth Offending Teams and social services. However, contracts were typically monitored by the police and housing.
- The majority (79%) of respondents (police and housing officers) felt that the scheme was positive, and most ABC schemes were set up because of perceived successes elsewhere.
- A wide variety of data sources were used to identify potential candidates including complaints, housing records, police intelligence and police statistics. The use of professional witnesses was not very common.
- Types of antisocial behaviour targeted included harassment, verbal abuse and criminal damage. ABCs were also used to tackle crime e.g. prostitution and joyriding.
- Forty-five per cent of respondents (76 of 169) who were currently running ABC schemes reported that one or more of their contracts had been breached. A total of 286 breaches were identified;

15% of all contracts issued. Most breaches involved criminal damage, verbal abuse and nuisance.

- Benefits of the scheme included addressing and reducing antisocial behaviour effectively.
- The main implementation problems were considered to be a lack of resources and time.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations for improving the way that ABCs are implemented. These recommendations contributed to the good practice guidance 'A Guide to Antisocial Behaviour Orders and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts' published by the Home Office in November 2002.

<p>Evidence gathering</p> <p><i>Make use of multi-agency data to maximise the evidence base against young people and to ensure that their circumstances are fully understood</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Make use of existing data sharing protocols with relevant agencies or develop new ones. – Make use of information from the education service, especially in relation to truancy and exclusions. – Include information about the victims of antisocial behaviour. – Develop ways of using photographic and video information. – Consider using professional witnesses to avoid the need to involve residents, who may feel intimidated. – Make use of social services and other agencies' data to improve understanding of perpetrators of antisocial behaviour with the aim of intervening more appropriately.
<p>Data collection and analysis</p> <p><i>Make use of more sophisticated data collection techniques to improve the way that complaints are dealt with, contracts are monitored and subsequent evaluation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Avoid paper files or ensure information from paper files is transferred to an electronic database. All databases must comply with data protection regulations. – Standardise the way that data are recorded. – Use a standard database that is compatible with a variety of applications e.g. Microsoft Excel or Access. – Ensure that police systems are interrogated regularly and information updated. – Ensure that multi-agency data are fed into the system.
<p>Selecting individuals for the scheme</p> <p><i>Improve the way that individuals are selected for the scheme to ensure the scheme is applied appropriately</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Assess whether an individual is really suitable for the scheme including: – A review of the persistent nature of a person's antisocial behaviour and/or criminal offending. – A review of whether the individual has other problems that may mean the contract is inappropriate e.g. mental health problems, persistent criminal behaviour.
<p>Publicity</p> <p><i>Ensure the scheme is well publicised</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Inform the community about the scheme through leaflets, public meetings and personal contacts. – Publicise the scheme widely within schools, youth clubs etc. to raise awareness amongst young people. – Publicise amongst all agencies, including the police, let them know the full range of services available to tackle antisocial behaviour.
<p>Multi-agency involvement</p> <p><i>Involve other agencies early on</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Hold meetings with key stakeholders to share relevant information and inform them of what is going on. – Including the Youth Offending Team (YOT) may offer the greatest benefits, particularly in relation to assistance in preventing re-offending. Youth services, particularly youth diversion schemes, also broaden the range of options for dealing with the problem of antisocial behaviour. – Education services should play a part as antisocial behaviour is evident in schools. – Support should be offered by all agencies to prevent re-offending and address the underlying causes of Antisocial behaviour.

Interviews
<i>Improve the original interview with police, housing, young person and their legal guardian</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If relevant parties fail to turn up make sure that this is chased up. - Make the interview less formal to avoid intimidating the family. - Choose a spacious room. - Only invite key stakeholders. - Allow adequate preparation time. - Ensure that evidence is available to show the parents if they want to see it. - Discuss the terms of the contract with the young people and their family. - Make sure that everyone is aware of the consequences of a breach of the contract.
Monitoring and feedback
<i>Ensure that there is adequate monitoring and feedback</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The importance of good monitoring cannot be overstated (various sources can be used including reports by local residents and agency staff). - Ensure enough staff and resources are available for monitoring. - Ensure that there is good communication between the agencies involved, especially in relation to sharing information to identify if the contracts have been breached. - Make sure that there are an adequate number of home visits throughout the duration of the contract. - Ensure that there are regular meetings of those involved in monitoring and implementing the scheme. - Ensure there is good information for residents who may act as witnesses to antisocial behaviour. Residents are an important source of information for monitoring purposes. - Ensure parents receive feedback about their children's behaviour through personal contact, telephone or letter. - Make sure that parents and young people know officially when the contract has ended and are updated formally about their child's behaviour at this point.
Breaches
<i>Dealing with breaches</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There needs to be a mechanism for alerting agencies to a breach of the contract – effective monitoring systems would assist with this. - Make sure that parents are informed officially if there has been a breach of the contract. - There must be some sort of action if the contract is known to have been breached – even if it is only an interview or warning.
Training
<i>Ensure training is available for staff involved in ABCs</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Include training on all the ABC processes. - Specify the practical implications of contracts – particularly the importance of monitoring. - Training is especially important on how to deal with breaches and legal issues. - Provide training for partner agencies. - Think about joint training. - An evolving knowledge base should be maintained.

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1. Introduction

Background

Antisocial behaviour amongst young people has increasingly become a matter of public concern (see for example HMIC, 1997 and 1999; Home Office, 2002a and 2003). There can be no doubt of the detrimental effect that antisocial behaviour has on the quality of life of those who experience it (Budd and Sims, 2001). Antisocial behaviour may also contribute to neighbourhood decline (Wilson and Kelling, 1982) and is associated with offending (Farrington, 1996).

The importance of antisocial behaviour has been reflected in recent legislation. For example the Housing Act 1996 introduced legislation to assist social landlords in reducing antisocial behaviour. This included greater power to evict antisocial tenants, introductory and starter tenancies, injunctions and exclusion policies. There is now a growing body of evidence about how social and private landlords tackle antisocial behaviour (see for example Nixon *et al*, 1999; Nixon *et al*, 2003 and Hunter *et al*, 2001).

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 set in place mechanisms for the police, in conjunction with other partners, to tackle the problem of antisocial behaviour. The Act also gave the police and other partners greater powers to tackle antisocial behaviour. Such measures include Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), parenting orders, child safety orders, local child curfews and the power to remove truanting children from the streets. In addition, the recent Police Reform Act 2002 contains a number of measures that will help tackle antisocial behaviour, including:

- The creation of Community Support Officers.
- New powers for accredited street wardens to address some antisocial behaviour offences.
- New powers for accredited persons to issue Fixed Penalty Notices for offences including cycling on a footway, dog fouling and litter.
- New police powers to deal with the antisocial use of motor vehicles on and off public roads.
- Provision for the British Transport Police (BTP) to remove a child or young person found in a public place whom they believe is truanting.
- Making it easier for relevant authorities to get ASBOs.

The Home Office recently published a White Paper on antisocial behaviour (Respect and Responsibility - Taking a Stand Against Antisocial Behaviour, 2003) which calls for a culture change to create a 'something for something' society in which the rights citizens enjoy are based on the responsibilities they have towards each other, their families and their communities. To take this agenda forward the Antisocial Behaviour Bill includes measures to:

- Widen the use of Fixed Penalty Notices - e.g. noise nuisance, truancy, graffiti - and apply them to 16-17 year olds.
- Develop a package of support and sanctions to enable parents to prevent and tackle antisocial behaviour by their children.
- Close down 'crack houses'.
- Restrict the use of air weapons and replica guns and ban air cartridge weapons that are easily converted to fire live ammunition.
- Make it an offence to sell spray paints to under-18s and provide stronger powers for local authorities to tackle fly-tipping, graffiti and fly-posting.
- Widen powers to shut down establishments that create noise nuisance.
- Ensure that courts consider the impact of antisocial behaviour on the wider community in all housing possession cases. Create demoted tenancies to allow for faster evictions and remove the right to buy of antisocial tenants.
- Improve the operation of Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs).

ASBOs

The Antisocial Behaviour Order (ASBO) was an addition to the range of measures the police and local authorities have to tackle antisocial behaviour, introduced as part of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. ASBOs aim to protect the community from an individual or individuals whose actions are not necessarily criminal but are nevertheless causing harassment, alarm or distress. Proceedings to apply for an ASBO are civil, not criminal, and civil rules of evidence apply, although past acts of antisocial behaviour should be proved to an equivalent of criminal standard. Breaching an ASBO is a criminal offence and the courts can impose penalties of up to five years imprisonment.

In order to enhance the effectiveness of ASBOs, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 was amended by the Police Reform Act 2002. Specific measures introduced were:

- Interim orders to stop antisocial behaviour earlier and help protect witnesses.
- Enable Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and British Transport Police (BTP) to apply for ASBOs.
- Allow orders to cover a wider area, up to the whole of England and Wales, to prevent displacement.
- Allow the criminal courts to make orders following a conviction and in addition to sentencing.
- Extend the power to make orders to the county courts alongside related proceedings.

It is anticipated that these changes will ensure swifter justice, with courts imposing ASBOs more quickly and preventing offenders behaving in an antisocial manner in wider areas. RSLs and BTP will now be able to apply for ASBOs to protect members of the public from loutish, intimidating behaviour and low-level offending. Revised guidance has also been produced which incorporates Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) and includes examples of good practice from around the country (Home Office, 2002a).

The Antisocial Behaviour Bill builds on the measures delivered by the Police Reform Act 2002 and tackles factors which hinder the process of obtaining an ASBO. The Antisocial Behaviour Bill will:

- Provide agencies that have obtained orders with automatic access to breach prosecutions in the youth court to monitor the case and keep witnesses and victims informed.
- Enable local authorities to prosecute breaches of ASBOs.
- Enable better use of orders on conviction for antisocial behaviour by defining the role of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).
- Remove automatic reporting restrictions on orders on convictions made in the youth court to bring these orders into line with ASBOs made against young people in the magistrates' court.
- Extend orders in the county court so that when a tenant is being evicted, for example, due to the antisocial behaviour of a family member or friend, the court can also make an order against the person responsible for the antisocial behaviour.
- Ensure that parenting orders are made, where appropriate, when a juvenile under the age of 16 is given an ASBO.
- Extend the power to apply for ASBOs to Housing Action Trusts (HATs).

Other relevant legislation includes:

- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997.
- Environmental Protection Act 1990.
- Noise Act 1996.

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts in Islington

An Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC) is a written, voluntary agreement between a youth, the local housing office and the police. Islington Borough Council Housing Department and Islington Borough Police established the scheme in December 1999 in response to problems of antisocial behaviour amongst young people. The scheme was later extended to include RSLs.

The scheme draws on some of the principles of ASBOs and they are very similar in design. However, the police and council do not have to apply to a magistrate and they are not legally binding. The aim was to provide a quicker alternative to applying for an ASBO that could be achieved using existing resources, within existing organisational frameworks and drawing on existing powers to tackle nuisance.

Young people, who are identified as having been engaged in persistent antisocial behaviour, are invited along with their parents or legal guardian, to an interview with the housing department and the police. The aim is to discuss the problem and to identify a series of behaviours that the young person would agree not to engage in over the coming six months. The young person is under no obligation to sign the contract. The family are informed at the interview that if the contract is broken and they hold a council or RSL tenancy, the housing department or RSL may initiate possession action against their tenancy. The young person may also become subject to an ASBO, if they breach the contract. This is particularly the case where the subject of the ABC is not living in rented property and so the threat of eviction cannot be used.

The scheme is not designed to replace the ASBO but to complement it. Evidence collected for the purposes of ABCs would also be used for the purpose of ASBOs if necessary. This means that there is no duplication of effort or resources if an ASBO was later applied for, and has the benefit that if an ABC is successful the costs are minimal. Breach of an ABC can also be used as evidence in an ASBO application.

Defining antisocial behaviour

Formal definitions

Defining antisocial behaviour for operational purposes and measurement is problematic. The law defines criminal behaviour but there are no such definitions for antisocial behaviour. Many formal definitions are wide ranging. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 defines antisocial behaviour as 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.’

The Chartered Institute of Housing (good practice briefing) defined antisocial behaviour as

‘behaviour that unreasonably interferes with other people’s rights to the use and enjoyment of their home and community.’

Definitions in practice

Antisocial behaviour is a subjective relative concept, which can vary over time and location. Defining behaviour as antisocial depends on a number of factors including context, location, community tolerance and quality of life expectations (Nixon *et al*, 2003). Quite often in practice there is no single definition of antisocial behaviour at all. Many housing organisations use a three-part categorisation of complaints about neighbours (Atkinson *et al*, 2000):

- neighbourhood disputes – minor clashes of life-style;
- antisocial behaviour – more serious complaints that affect a wider range of neighbours and the neighbourhood; and,
- criminal behaviour – for example vandalism, violence and drug dealing.

It is also very common for a list of behaviours that are considered to be antisocial to be presented (Moore and Lawrence, 2000). Bland and Read (2000) noted that police services rarely have a specific definition and officers generally took a ‘common sense’ view of what constituted antisocial behaviour, drawing on day-to-day operational experiences. Similarly a review of definitions used in 1998 Community Safety Strategies showed that Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships rarely had a formal definition: it being more common to cite examples of the types of behaviour that might be construed as antisocial (Bullock and Loxley, 1999). Thus, in practice, actions defined as antisocial cover a broad spectrum of behaviours (Crime Reduction Toolkit, 2000). Box 1 notes some of the wide

range of behaviour that has been defined as antisocial in the literature and by practitioners working in the field, some of it is criminal.

Box 1.1: Range of antisocial behaviour

Using and selling drugs
Unkempt gardens (e.g. those which attract dumping of goods, creating 'eyesores')
Alcohol and solvent abuse
Prostitution
Verbal abuse
Uncontrolled pets and animals
Intimidating gatherings of young people in public places
Harassment (including racist and homophobic incidents)
Damage to property (including graffiti and vandalism)
Intimidation
Nuisance from vehicles (including parking and abandonment)
Nuisance from business use
Rubbish dumping and misuse of communal areas
Riding/cycling on footpaths
Aggressive begging
Dropping litter
Racial harassment
Noisy parties/neighbours
Substance misuse
Public drunkenness

Evaluating ABCs

The research

The research aimed to:

- Describe the process of ABCs in Islington and, issues of implementation, and highlight ways of improving the scheme.
- Look at the characteristics of perpetrators of antisocial behaviour and their families in Islington.
- Identify the extent to which young people breached the terms of the contract in Islington.
- Examine the use of ABCs by police forces and a sample of local authorities in England and Wales.

Assessing the impact of the ABC scheme in Islington

The impact of 95 of the 104 contracts issued in Islington (51 in 1999/2000 and 44 in 2000/2001) was assessed. Reflecting the difficulties in measuring antisocial behaviour, a range of qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed for the purposes of evaluating this scheme.

- Police intelligence relating to the behaviour of 95 individuals before and during the contracts extracted from the Metropolitan Police Service intelligence system (Crimints). This includes stop/search records, arrests, observations of patrol and other officers, information from partner agencies and residents.
- A sample of local authority and RSL housing files containing data collected by the local housing offices relating to complaints by residents, caretakers and other staff about 53 of the young people on the contracts.¹
- Monitoring reports from Islington Borough Police for 95 of the cases, including incident record books.²
- Background data from education welfare officers and schools for 19 children placed on contracts.

¹ It was not practical to obtain all the relevant housing files because they are paper records and would present a huge task for housing staff.

² Less than a third (28) of cases had completed incident record books on file, nearly half of which were completed retrospectively. The remaining were either missing or not completed.

- Interviews with 25 police and housing officers. In total, police and housing officers interviewed had taken out a total of 210 ABCs since they became involved in the scheme, an average of 8.4 per respondent. Some of these ABCs were included in the evaluation.
- Observation of several training days hosted by Islington Antisocial Behaviour Team and a survey of 10 police and housing officers who attended the training.
- A survey of 20 housing and police officers directly involved in setting up and implementing the scheme.
- Observation of 28 ABC interviews involving police, housing, the young person subject to an ABC and their legal guardian.
- A survey of 26 children placed on the scheme and their parents.
- Interviews with 7 parents who had children on the scheme to examine their attitudes and suggestions for improvements.

The use of ABCs in England and Wales

- A survey of 42 police forces and a sample of 190 local authorities in England and Wales to assess the use of ABCs. In total 262³ surveys were sent out and 258⁴ were returned, a response rate of 98%.

The report

Chapter two describes the process of obtaining an ABC in Islington both in terms of what was planned and what happened in practice. Chapter three examines the characteristics of those young people on contracts in Islington including the amount of crime and antisocial behaviour that they were engaged in prior to the contracts. Chapter four discusses the impact of the ABC scheme in Islington. Chapter five looks at the spread of ABCs throughout England and Wales.

³ The survey was sent to 42 police forces, 30 London metropolitan police forces and 190 local authorities. Chief Constables and Chief Executives were asked to pass the survey on to all relevant individuals for completion.

⁴ 164 from local authorities, 89 from police forces and 5 'other'. More surveys were returned by the police than had been originally posted to Chief Constables, because more than one BCU could have been running an ABC scheme in a police force area.

2. Responding to antisocial behaviour: Acceptable Behaviour Contracts in Islington

KEY POINTS

- One hundred and four young people had been on an ABC in Islington between January 1999 - October 2000 and May 2001 – December 2001.
- Young people were most commonly identified for the scheme from complaints to estate managers (96%), police stops (44%) and from police intelligence (36%).
- Practitioners tended to favour ABCs over ASBOs, and interviewing young people about their antisocial behaviour was considered by practitioners to be a constructive way of dealing with the problem.
- Contracts were usually six months in length and contained seven terms, on average.
- Contracts normally prohibited damaging property (85%), verbally abusing residents or passers-by (85%) and writing graffiti (76%).
- The terms of the contract were generally considered to be fair by practitioners.
- There were issues relating to the monitoring of the scheme, which included:
 - The amount of time and resources available to police and housing officers who were responsible for implementing the scheme on top of existing duties.
 - The problem of identifying those responsible for antisocial behaviour and the lack of intelligence to monitor and evaluate the scheme.
- The use of diversion schemes and provision of additional facilities to young people on the scheme was seen as important by parents and practitioners to reduce antisocial behaviour.
- The inter-agency aspect of the scheme was seen as very important. Islington Antisocial Behaviour Team were charged with notifying all relevant agencies.
- Suggestions on how to improve the scheme included additional publicity and improved monitoring by a dedicated antisocial behaviour team (established May 2001).

The development of the ABC scheme in Islington

The London Borough of Islington housing department and the police were one of the first areas to develop and implement ABCs as a way of controlling antisocial behaviour. The ABC was designed to use existing resources, within existing organisational frameworks and draw upon existing powers to tackle nuisance. As already mentioned, social landlords already have a range of options available to them with which to deal with antisocial behaviour. Box 2.1 identifies some of the options (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000).

Box 2.1: Options for landlords dealing with antisocial behaviour

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
Introductory and starter tenancies		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local authority can end a tenancy within the first 12 months without having to prove grounds for possession. Since 1998 RSLs have similar powers when there is a need to protect residents or housing stock. Demoted tenancies will be available from 2004 onwards with the introduction of the Antisocial Behaviour Bill. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can contribute to the reduction of antisocial behaviour as part of wider schemes. Demoted tenancies will speed up eviction and remove the right to buy for antisocial tenants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence suggests that the propensity to behave in an antisocial manner is not related to the length of the tenancy (Nixon <i>et al</i>, 1999; Hunter and Nixon, 2001b). Great variation in take up amongst local authorities and social landlords.
Evictions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Housing Act 1996 strengthened the power of landlords to evict antisocial tenants. From 2004 onwards the Antisocial Behaviour Bill will ensure that courts consider the impact of ASB on the wider community in all possession cases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local authority or RSL can issue a possession summons for breach of tenancy terms which targets the offender and offending behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arguably very punitive as it involves the loss of the home for family members as well as the perpetrator.
Injunctions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be sought to prevent those aged over 18 breaching tenancy agreements, causing nuisance to property or services, damaging property, or causing a nuisance involving violence near local authority housing. Powers will be extended to RSLs from 2004 onwards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designed to target offending behaviour without the additional threat of loss of home to extended family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There has been reluctance to use injunctions (Nixon <i>et al</i>, 1999).
Exclusion policies		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Housing Act 1996 required local authorities to establish registers and to offer permanent housing only to those people on the register. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Around half of social landlords exclude people from their waiting list if they have been involved in antisocial behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is concern about 'blanket bans' on exclusion policies. Criteria and time limits vary greatly. Exclusions may not always be justified.
ASBOs		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduced in 1998 to assist police and local authorities protect individuals / communities from antisocial behaviour. Power extended to RSLs and BTP in 2002 and HATs in 2004. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tackle behaviour that may not be criminal but causes alarm, distress or harassment e.g. loutish and intimidating behaviour and low-level offending. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practitioners expressed concern over the time, cost and resources required to obtain an ASBO (Campbell, 2002). Concerns were addressed in the Police Reform Bill 2002.

Source: Adapted from Social Exclusion Unit (PAT 8, 2000).

Many of these, including possession action and injunctions, do not require a multi-agency approach to tackling the problem. However, local authorities, in their capacity as members of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, have a statutory obligation to participate in strategic approaches to reducing local problems. In Islington the ABC scheme was an attempt to combine these two roles. The aim was to warn the perpetrator and their family of the consequences of their actions and give them a chance to improve their behaviour. It also would give an opportunity for families to link into the range of services that a multi-agency setting could provide to tackle some of the underlying causes of antisocial behaviour.

But why not ASBOs?

The ABC scheme draws on some of the principles of ASBOs and they are very similar in design. Islington officers (housing and police) reported that they did not feel that they had the capacity to respond to antisocial behaviour using ASBOs. They felt that the systems were not in place for systematically gathering evidence and that the expertise or resources were not available to take cases to court, despite relevant procedures being introduced in Islington shortly after ASBOs were launched. Negative reporting of ASBOs in the national press and the perceived cost were of particular concern. These problems are resonant with recent research which suggests that whilst partnerships have generally had a positive experience with ASBOs there have been specific problems which have impacted on willingness to adopt them (Campbell, 2002). The Government has however acted quickly to address these difficulties and the Police Reform Act 2002 contained five important changes to ASBOs.

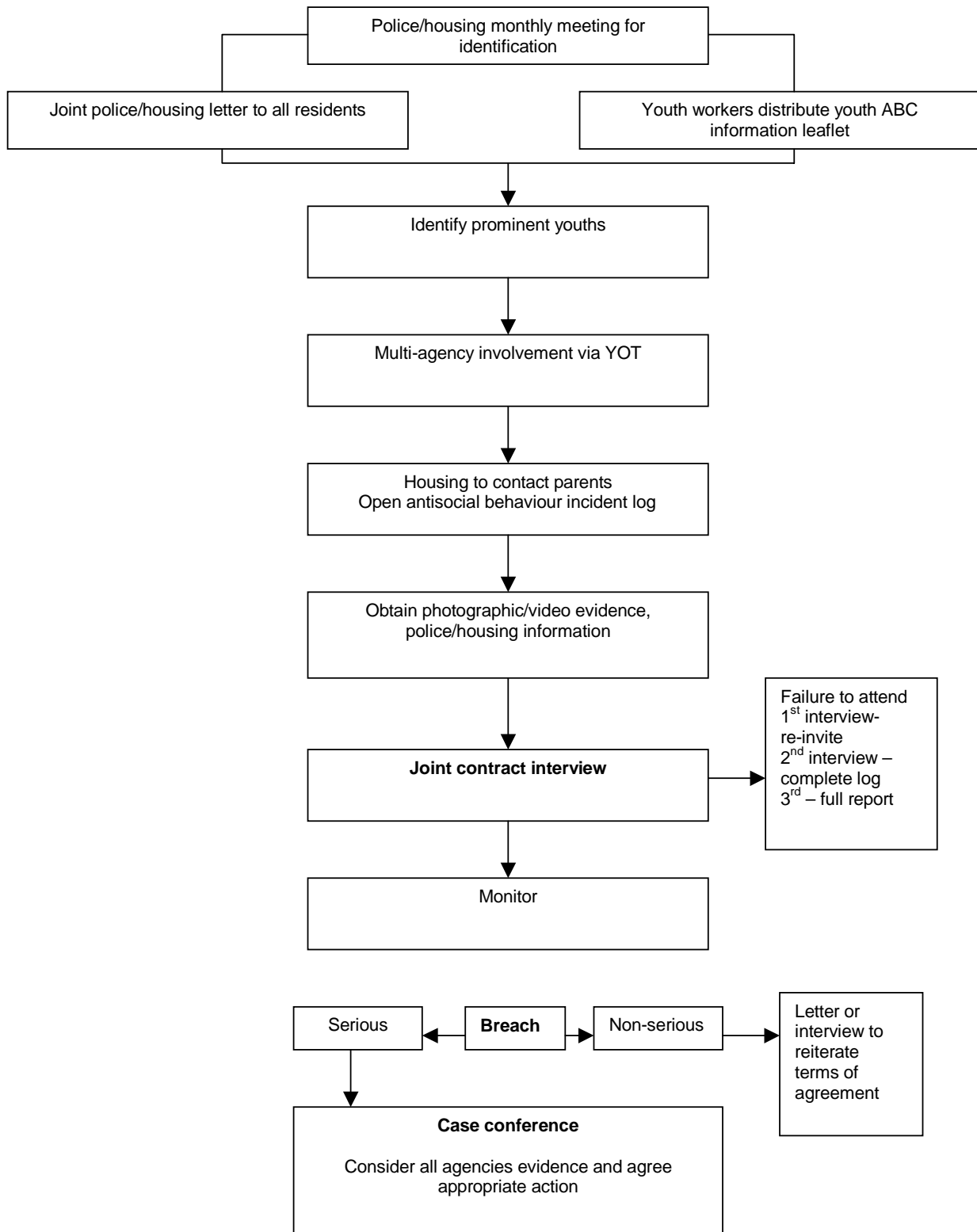
The process: the Islington model

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) are written agreements between a young person, the local housing office/Registered Social Landlord and the local police. The contracts were originally designed for those living in council-owned property. However, as relationships with RSLs were developed and information-sharing protocols drawn up, RSLs also adopted the scheme. The scheme could (and has been) used with people living in private accommodation where the consequence of breaching a contract would have to be imposition of an ASBO. Action can also be taken against Council Right to Buy Leaseholders for breach of the terms of the lease.

The sanctions that can be brought to bear in cases of breach of the contract vary according to the legal status of the landlord. Local authority landlords have wider powers than RSLs in terms of the use of introductory tenancies, the use of injunctions for tenants and non-tenants (section 152 of the Housing Act 1996) and access to ASBO proceedings. From December 2002 onwards RSLs have been able to undertake ASBO proceedings, but this was not the case during the evaluation period.

Between January 1999 and December 2001, 104 young people were on the scheme. For this evaluation, data were available for 95 of them. The following sections describe the procedures for implementing an ABC (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Acceptable Behaviour Contracts process model



Procedures for implementing an ABC in Islington

Gathering evidence for ABCs

A young person would come to the attention of the housing office or the police from a number of sources for committing a series of actions that were considered to be antisocial. The most common forms of evidence used during phase one were residents' complaints to estate workers (96%), police intelligence (Crimint) (36%) and police stop data (44%) (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Sources of information about antisocial behaviour

Data source	Number	Percentage*
Complaints to estate manager	48	96
Police stops	22	44
Crimint entry (police intelligence)	18	36
Professional witness	18	36
Estate worker observations	16	32
Tenant statement	15	30
Photographic evidence	14	28
Self-admission	8	16
Other police intelligence	7	14
Video evidence	7	14
Discussions with residents	5	10
Calls for service	4	8
Arrests	4	8
Resident petition	1	2

Source: Police and housing records from phase one.

Base: 50 valid cases.

* Respondents could choose more than one answer. Responses total more than 100%.

During the second year of the project, evidence came from complaints to council or police intelligence (23 of 25 cases each) and complaints from council staff (22 of 25 cases). Use was also made of crime statistics (22 of 25 cases) and other intelligence (17 of 25 cases). Most practitioners felt that this was enough information; only five felt that they needed more. The need for a uniform and continuous approach to data collection was expressed.

Interviews with police and housing officers in year two revealed that a number of officers thought that other sources of data could be used to inform the contracts. These included:

- Information from the education service, especially information on truancy and exclusions.
- More information from and about the victims of antisocial behaviour.
- Photographic information.
- Social services data.
- Information from professional witnesses (which means that residents do not have to give evidence).
- More information on the social background of the children committing antisocial behaviour through a multi-agency approach.
- Information from other schemes and agencies, for example youth services or Crime Reduction in Secondary Schools (CRISS).⁵

Publicity

Upon identification of an area/housing estate with increased disorder levels it was recommended, though not required, that a joint police/housing letter should be sent to all residents in the target area prior to seeking an ABC for monitoring purposes. The letter discusses the problems caused by antisocial youths on the estate, and includes a general description of the unacceptable behaviour

⁵ CRISS was funded under the Government's 1999 Crime Reduction Programme and involves interventions in secondary schools which seek to address bullying, exclusion, absence and truancy.

occurring. It invites residents to record the details of all problem behaviour experienced/witnessed and complete nuisance diaries, which can be used for evidential purposes.

The parents of those on ABCs interviewed did not recall receiving this letter and generally felt the scheme could be advertised better. Likewise, some of the police officers interviewed suggested ways of publicising the scheme, in particular within the local schools and on the local estates to raise awareness of the scheme and its consequences.

Interviewing young people and their families about antisocial behaviour

Inviting the young person and family to interview

Another letter is sent specifically to the parents or legal guardian of the young person who has come to the attention of the police and housing, informing them of their child's behaviour. This letter invites both the young person and their legal guardian to attend an interview with the police and housing at their local housing office to discuss the behaviour of that young person. The letter informs the family that on completion of this interview the child will be expected to sign an ABC and adhere to its terms and conditions for a period of six months. If they did not attend the interview without good reason, a further letter would be sent. If the family failed to comply the second time, a report would be made which could be used if further proceedings were to be taken against the family.

The interview

The interview would take place at the housing office rather than the police station to demonstrate that the scheme was housing led and to show that the individual was not part of a criminal investigation. The police, area housing manager, housing services manager or housing officer would be present. The parent or guardian would also be present and other interested parties such as the family's support officer or social worker. The interview would not go ahead if the youth, for any reason, did not turn up. If the parent or guardian turned up without the child the purpose of the ABC scheme would be discussed with them.

Between May and December 2001 28 ABC interviews were observed. Not all interviews arranged resulted in a signed ABC. In total, 68 per cent of interviews observed resulted in a contract being signed (19 of 28). Nine families failed to keep their first appointment and of the 19 families that did attend, two families refused to sign the contract. Of the nine families invited to attend a second appointment, three reconvened interviews were held, two of which resulted in an ABC being signed. Parents who failed to attend the first interview received a letter requesting them to attend a second interview. If the family failed to attend the second interview, housing officers and the police said they would monitor the child's actions as the contracts are voluntary and they could not force the young people to participate.

Conducting the interview

At interview the young person would be presented with the evidence that had been gathered and expected to recognise that had been involved in antisocial behaviour. The aim was not to dwell on previous behaviour, as the ABC is not an enforcement scheme. The stated procedure was:

- Young people should be told about the problems in the area with antisocial behaviour and the fact that they are part of a group identified as responsible for this.
- The types of behaviour that the youth would not get involved in in the future would be discussed.
- The young person would be invited to assist in drawing up the contract by identifying the kinds of behaviour that they would not engage in.

Establishing trust between parents and officers was a key feature of the interviews observed. Parents often stated that they wanted to see evidence of their children committing antisocial behaviour, but this was not always possible. Where evidence was not shown parents sometimes expressed concern about its existence. The importance of developing procedures to deal with disclosing evidence of antisocial behaviour became evident although this may be difficult in some instances.

Improving the interviews

Interviews with practitioners showed that they all thought the contract interviews were a suitable way of introducing young people and their parents to the scheme. Practitioners generally thought that the young people and their families received enough information about the implications of the scheme (21 out of 25 cases).

Despite this, the majority (18 out of 25 respondents) felt that the initial ABC interview could be improved by:

- More preparation time.
- Involving youth services.
- Giving people more information about the consequences of breaching.
- Making the interviews less formal.
- Using a larger interview room.

Terms and conditions of contract

The intention was to draw up the contract at the housing office, with copies kept by the local housing manager, the police, the parent or guardian of the youth involved and the Youth Offending Team. The terms should be specific to the particular actions of the individual and usually to the areas where the antisocial behaviour had occurred. Towards the end of the evaluation it was evident that the conditions of contract had become more generic in an attempt to prevent children engaging in any form of antisocial behaviour and to prevent potential displacement of the problem behaviour.

On average there were seven conditions of contract prohibiting a range of behaviours. Most common was not damaging property and not verbally abusing residents or passers-by (85% each), followed by not writing graffiti (76%). Some of the terms refer to crimes (forcing entry into property and joyriding) while some refer to quite minor nuisances including swearing in public places, behaviour that anyone can legally do (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Terms of contract

Terms of contract	Number of contracts	Percentage*
Will not damage property	81	85
Will not verbally abuse passers-by/residents	81	85
Will not write graffiti	72	76
Will not throw stones or other objects	68	72
Will not congregate in groups	64	67
Will not joyride	59	62
Will not threaten	57	60
Will not swear	54	57
Will not climb on public or private property	40	42
Will not be rude to passers-by/tenants	35	37
Will not hang about in public areas	32	34
Will not be loud in public places	29	31
Other	29	31
Will not spit	21	22
Will not smoke in public	17	18
Will not set fire to things	13	14
Will not smoke	13	14
Will not harrass physically	12	13
Will not discard cigarettes	11	12
Will not force entry to property	10	11
Will not damage environment	8	8
Will not smash glass	6	6
Will not damage cars	5	5
Will not ring door bells	4	4

Source: Conditions of contracts issued during evaluation.
 Base: 95 contracts. Each contract contained seven terms on average.
 * Responses total more than 100%.

Observation of ABC interviews showed that contract terms were sometimes not discussed with the child during the interview and children had little input into the conditions of the contract. In 22 of the 28 interviews observed, housing officers brought draft contracts to the interview where police officers read through the terms with the child and their family, rather than negotiating the conditions at the meeting. Terms were negotiated in one of the 28 interviews observed.

The contracts were usually six months in length but were sometimes extended if breaches had been identified. Several children were placed on a second ABC during the second evaluation phase (7 of 44 cases) because they were deemed to have breached the first contract, there was no improvement in their behaviour whilst on the first contract, there was no reduction in the amount of antisocial behaviour committed whilst on the first contract, or the problem behaviour resumed shortly after the first contract had been completed.

Nearly all practitioners interviewed felt that the terms and conditions of contract were fair (24 of 25) and reflected the types of behaviour in which the children had been engaged (25 out of 25).

Children placed on the ABCs and their parents were also inclined to view the contracts as fair with most understanding the consequences of breaching an ABC.

- Twenty-three parents of the 26 surveyed said that they understood the terms of the contract and 24 understood the consequences of their child breaching an ABC.
- Eighteen parents thought the contract was fair.
- Twenty-five children of the 26 surveyed stated that they understood the contract.
- Twenty-three children understood what would happen if they breached the contract and only three thought the contract was not fair.

Monitoring and feedback

Monitoring

When the contract was signed, the details were to be passed on to patrolling officers, housing officers and staff at the area housing office. The Antisocial Behaviour Team oversaw all of the contracts when it was set up in May 2001.

Contracts were meant to be monitored jointly by police and housing, but in practice the police were primarily responsible though they would act on information given to them by housing officers and ultimately housing would be responsible for any eviction.

The aim was to review the contracts every four weeks at the police and housing officers joint crime meeting. The police aimed to complete a monthly report updating information on their intelligence system about the individual's behaviour. Monthly meetings between the police and housing were seen by those interviewed as extremely useful and provided a forum through which intelligence could be gathered and information exchanged. However, these meetings did not always take place. One RSL (of the five involved in the scheme during the evaluation period) stated in interview that they only held monthly meetings with the police once persistent breaches had been identified. The aim was also to provide two home visits during the contract.

Contrary to the agreed contract monitoring policy of monthly meetings with police/housing, monthly Crimint reports and two home visits in six months, contracts were not always monitored as rigorously as was intended. The monthly update of the intelligence system (Crimint) was completed in only 19% of contracts issued during phase one (10 of 54) (Table 2.3), and home visits were conducted for 28% of these contracts (15 of 54). For a large number of contracts in the first year it was unclear if there had been monthly reports, home visits or whether the contract had been reviewed and concern was expressed by police and housing officers initially involved in the scheme that there had not been sufficient monitoring of the contracts. Police and housing officers interviewed stated that the departure from agreed procedure was the result of working patterns and insufficient resources.

Table 2.3: Monitoring of scheme in the first year

Monitoring activity	Yes	No	No record of action taken	Total
Monthly update of intelligence system (Crimint)	10	25	19	54
Two home visits completed	15	20	19	54
Contract reviewed	26	9	19	54

Source: Monitoring details reported by police officers implementing the scheme in phase one.
Base: 54 contracts issued.

In year two, analysis of housing records (local authority and RSL), incident record books and police intelligence data showed that monitoring arrangements had not changed very much :

- Reviews (either a discussion of the case at monthly police/housing meetings or a review of the Crimint system by community contact officers) were completed for eleven of the 44 ABCs (25%).
- Three home visits were completed during this period.
- One ABC was formally ended with a meeting attended by police, housing, the young person and their legal guardian.

It is not clear whether these monitoring activities did not take place at all or whether they were not recorded. But officers interviewed stated that they were unable to complete the home visits because of time and resource constraints. Monitoring, it was claimed, tended to be *ad hoc* and involve police foot patrol rather than formal appointments and meetings.

Surveys and interviews with practitioners highlighted that the problem of monitoring the contracts stemmed from not having the appropriate levels of staff and resources available. Police officers frequently mentioned that the number of contracts per officer had to be kept quite low to ensure that the monitoring was adequate. Four or five contracts per officer was considered to be the right number. Officers also mentioned other methods that could improve monitoring of the scheme. They included:

- Less paperwork.
- Improved communication between the agencies involved. This included better information sharing to identify if the contracts had been breached.
- Greater number of home visits throughout the duration of the contract.
- Regular meetings of those involved in monitoring and implementing the scheme.
- Regular contact with the children and increased monitoring of post-contract behaviour.
- A greater number of officers involved in monitoring. This could involve a dedicated team.
- Better information for residents who may act as witnesses to antisocial behaviour. This may include professional witnesses to avoid the need to involve residents who may feel intimidated.

Responsibility for monitoring

The limited monitoring practices observed could have been the result of confusion over whether the police or housing were primarily responsible coupled with the fact that all officers (police and housing) were expected to monitor the contracts on top of existing duties.

Housing officers interviewed tended to believe it was the duty of the police to monitor the contracts and tackle any breaches identified. In addition, information recorded on housing files was not always passed on to the police and breaches went unidentified. Analysis of housing records by Home Office researchers showed that for three children there was clear evidence of further complaints by residents and caretakers indicating that contracts had been breached, but no action was taken. Further complaints about problem behaviour were often recorded by housing officers who did not know that the young person concerned was currently on an ABC. This was typically the case in larger housing offices where staff turnover was high and temporary agency staff were used to cover staff sickness and holidays.

Nearly all of the police interviewed believed that the monitoring of the contracts should be performed by Islington Antisocial Behaviour Team (IASBT) (20 cases), freeing police officers to perform pre-existing operational duties. Police officers suggested that the team should be responsible for identifying when home visits were necessary, and two officers believed that an IT system which flagged up when home visits were due would be advantageous.

Feedback

All the parents interviewed expressed a desire for feedback and were promised at the initial interview that they would receive regular reports on their child's progress. Although officers aimed to keep in contact with the families and provide feedback this was not always possible. Parents said that feedback could be improved by frequent home visits and meetings with police and housing to provide updates on the contract.

Dealing with breaches

The agreed policy was that any breach of the ABC was recorded in the incident record book held at the local housing office. However, it became clear that practitioners were often not aware when a contract had been breached, and incident record books were often not updated. None of the police and housing officers interviewed were aware of any breaches of the ABCs in which they were involved personally, but some practitioners did discuss breaches of contracts they had not been responsible for monitoring. Breaches were also discussed hypothetically in the interviews and respondents distinguished between hard and soft breaches. The majority of hypothetical breach situations discussed by practitioners were defined by both the police and housing officers as not serious, and stated that no further action would be warranted.

Other implementation issues

Training

Those who had attended the training were very positive about it. Of the 25 practitioners interviewed, just over a third had received formal training. Of these nine, nearly all considered the training to be suitable (8). However, there was a general feeling amongst the police and housing officers that more training and experience would enable them to take out more contracts.

Suggestions on how to improve the training included:

- Greater emphasis placed on the practical implication of contracts – especially in relation to the paperwork required.
- Greater emphasis placed on how to deal with breaches.
- Continual training and an evolving knowledge base maintained.
- All partners involved should be given training.

Partnership

When the Islington Acceptable Behaviour Contract scheme was initially established it comprised a partnership between Islington Borough Police and the London Borough of Islington. Some Registered Social Landlords were also involved in the early stages (7% of the ABCs taken out in the first year concerned young people living in such accommodation). The main Islington Registered Social Landlords are all now signed up to a data sharing agreement and can be involved in the scheme if necessary. By the time of the second phase of the evaluation, three in ten contracts were taken out by RSLs (13 of 44).

During the first phase of the evaluation officers felt that the inclusion of several agencies including social services, education and Youth Offending Teams (YOT) would offer the greatest benefits, particularly in relation to preventing re-offending. This has now largely been addressed, and the antisocial behaviour team have now forged promising working relationships with designated officers within each of these agencies. By the second year, there was greater multi-agency working, particularly with the Youth Offending Team. Islington Antisocial Behaviour Team (IASBT) now inform the following agencies:

- The Youth Offending Team via form 78 (Notification of children or young persons coming to notice of the police).
- Crime Reduction in Secondary Schools (CRISS).
- The school.
- Education welfare officers.
- Social services.

Both practitioners and the parents felt that the scheme needed to be accompanied by an improved provision of facilities and diversionary schemes for the young people.

3. Characteristics of those on contracts in Islington

KEY POINTS

- In Islington, young people came to the attention of the police on average 1.7 times for antisocial behaviour before their contract started. They were also involved in a wide range of criminal behaviour e.g. burglary, vehicle and motorbike theft.
- Young people were involved in a wide range of antisocial behaviour including threatening and intimidating residents, graffiti and criminal damage. Each child committed an average of six different types of antisocial behaviour prior to their contract.
- The average age of those on the contract was 16 but there was a wide range in the ages.
- Eighty-eight per cent of contracts were issued for males.
- Those on contract in Islington normally lived in council accommodation, which their family had normally lived in for more than 10 years. This suggests the tendency to commit antisocial behaviour is not linked to short length of tenancy.
- It was common for young people on contract to come from large families with three or more children. Several households had two children on an ABC simultaneously.
- In Islington, the young people had a range of social and familial problems and were known to a range of welfare services.
- The young people were likely to engage in antisocial behaviour at school, had often been excluded from school at least once and truanted regularly.
- Parents, practitioners and the young people involved in the Islington scheme stated that antisocial behaviour was due to boredom or peer pressure.

Contact with the police for antisocial behaviour prior to contract

Police intelligence and housing records showed that the young people on the Islington scheme had been involved in a wide range of antisocial behaviour before the contract started. The average number of times that an individual came into contact with the police for antisocial behaviour before the contract was 1.7. This varied widely. In just over a third of cases (36) there was no evidence that the young person had previously had any contact with the police or local housing office at all. In such cases the information about an individual's antisocial behaviour came from an alternative source. In contrast, some individuals had come into contact with the police on at least ten occasions for antisocial behaviour (Table 3.1). Four young people had come into contact with police or housing officers 46 times in the six months prior to their contract, one had a total of 14 contacts.

Table 3.1: All contacts with the police/housing for antisocial behaviour prior to contract

Numbers of contacts	Number of people on contracts	Per cent
None	36	38
1	28	29
2-4	21	22
5-9	6	6
10+	4	4

Source: Police Crimint entries and housing files.
Base: 95 valid cases.

Type of antisocial behaviour

Information collected during the first phase of the evaluation reveals involvement in a wide range of antisocial behaviour and crime prior to a contract being issued. Whilst there is overlap between crime and antisocial behaviour, e.g. graffiti and criminal damage, on the whole crimes were not included as conditions of contract.

On average the young people had been involved in six different types of antisocial behaviour before the commencement of the contract (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Types of antisocial behaviour and crime

Antisocial acts	Number of children	Per cent*
Threatening residents	36	72
Intimidating residents	35	70
Graffiti	30	60
Drinking alcohol in public	19	38
Hanging around in groups	18	36
Smoking	15	30
Throwing things at residents	13	26
Noise disturbance	13	26
Climbing on public buildings	8	16
Throwing rubbish and littering	8	16
Spitting	5	10
Fires in communal areas	5	10
Other	4	8
Swearing at residents	4	8
Smashing glass and bottles	4	8
Ringing doorbells and running away	3	6
Following/chasing residents	2	4
Riding pedal cycles in communal areas	2	4
Kicking balls at houses	2	4
Playing in lift area	2	4
Homophobic abuse	1	2
Criminal acts		
Criminal damage	24	48
Riding stolen mopeds	21	42
Vehicle theft	11	22
Assault	7	14
Possession of drugs	3	6
Possession of knives	2	4
Burglary	1	2
Smoking cannabis	1	2
Going equipped	1	2

Source: Police Crimint entries.

Base: 50 valid cases.

* Young people were involved in more than one type of antisocial behaviour. Responses total more than 100%.

Table 3.3 shows the results of a self-report survey that 26 of the young people on contracts in the second year completed and shows contracts tended to be well targeted in terms of behaviours. Children had engaged in both criminal and antisocial behaviour prior to their involvement in the scheme (Table 3.3).

On average, the young people admitted to having been involved in six different types of antisocial behaviour.

Table 3.3: Self-reporting survey

Antisocial behaviour admitted	Number of children	Percent*
Hang about in groups	21	81
Noise disturbance	15	58
Throw rubbish and litter	12	46
Ride pedal cycles in communal areas	12	46
Drink alcohol in public	8	31
Climb on public buildings	8	31
Smoke	7	27
Play in lift area	6	23
Climb on buildings	6	23
Throw things at residents	6	23
Smash glass and bottles	6	23
Kick balls at houses	5	19
Smoke in public	5	19
Graffiti	5	19
Ring doorbells and run away	3	12
Make fires in communal areas	3	12
Spit at residents	2	8
Swear at residents	2	8
Threaten residents	2	8
Damage buildings	1	4
Follow/chase residents	1	4
Sexual abusiveness	1	4
Criminal behaviour admitted		
Ride stolen cycles	8	31
Vehicle theft	5	19
Smoke cannabis	3	12
Assault	2	8
Go equipped	2	8
Possession of drugs	2	8
Possession of knives	1	4
Burglary	1	4

Source: Self-reporting surveys completed by children placed on contracts in phase two.

Base: 26 valid cases.

* Young people could choose more than one type of behaviour. Responses total more than 100%.

Contact with the police for criminal activity

It is clear from police intelligence reports that many of the individuals who were identified for inclusion on the ABC scheme were committing crime as well as antisocial behaviour. The 95 young people placed on contracts during the two evaluation periods were stopped 99 times by the police and arrested 85 times in the preceeding six month period. Fifty-six other types of contact with police or housing officers was also recorded during this pre-contract period.

The average number of times that the young people had been stopped before the contract was taken out was 1.04 and the average number of arrests was 0.9. The extent to which the young people were known to the police before the contract was variable. The majority of individuals on contract had not been stopped (53 out of 95) or arrested (56 out of 95). However, of those that had been, just over half (22) had been stopped at least twice and just under half (19) had been arrested at least twice. Intelligence information showed that a small number of the individuals were or had been Islington Borough Police prominent nominals.⁶

⁶ They had been identified by the police as being responsible for a lot of crime. Offences include vehicle crime and racial harassment.

Table 3.4: Contacts with police for criminal behaviour prior to the contracts

Frequency of contact	Number of young people stopped	Number of young people arrested	Number of people who had other contact with police/housing
None	53	56	64
1	20	20	18
2-4	17	14	11
5-9	4	5	2
10+	1	0	0

Source: Police intelligence reports and housing records.
Base : 95 valid cases.

The type of crimes that young people had been stopped or arrested for was wide-ranging. Burglary, vehicle and motorbike theft were by far the most common. However, there was involvement in many kinds of crime including joyriding, assaults, robbery and handling stolen goods.

Characteristics of perpetrators

Age, gender and housing tenure

The contract was designed for people aged between ten and 18. The average age of individuals at the time they signed the contract was 16. However, there was quite a large distribution of ages, the youngest age was eight and the oldest 26.

The average age of the children declined from 17 in the first phase to 15 in the second. The antisocial behaviour team did acknowledge that they had changed the focus of their scheme to target younger children during phase two in an effort to prevent them from becoming involved in petty criminal behaviour at a later stage.

Overall, 88% of those on contracts were male (phase 1 and 2) which is similar to the findings for ASBOs which showed that 84% of ASBOs were used for men and about three quarters were for those aged under 21 (Campbell, 2002).

ABCs were not frequently used to curtail the activities of non local authority or RSL tenants e.g. children of leaseholders, owner-occupiers and private landlords. The majority of young people (85% in phase one and 81% in phase two) lived in council owned property.

Family background

Parents whose children were placed on contracts between May 2001 and December 2001 were surveyed to highlight key demographic, social and family characteristics. Twenty-six parents completed the survey, either in person or by post.

Ninety-six per cent of those who completed the survey were female (25). Half were single (13), and 15% (4) were married. Thirty-one per cent of parents (8) were unemployed, 35% were homemakers (9) and just 23% (6) worked part-time. Half the parents who returned surveys in Islington had lived at their present address for more than 10 years. This suggests that the tendency to commit antisocial behaviour is not linked to the length of tenancy, as highlighted by previous research (Nixon *et al*, 1999).

Previous research shows that a large family size is a relatively strong and highly reliable predictor of delinquency (Fischer, 1984; Ellis, 1988). Boys with four or more siblings by their tenth birthday have double the risk of being convicted as a juvenile (West and Farrington, 1973). Children placed on contracts in Islington were also likely to come from large families with some siblings being placed on contracts at the same time. Twenty-two parents surveyed had three or more children living at home and analysis of the contracts issued between May 2001 and December 2001 showed that 15 contracts (34%) were issued for two or more members of the same family.

Data from education welfare and schools also showed that children placed on ABCs during phase two had a wide range of social and family problems. These children were likely to be known to other agencies who were also involved in their care and welfare. Table 3.5 shows which agencies were involved.

Table 3.5: Other agency involvement

Agency or intervention	Number of children	Per cent*
Not known to education services	18	49
Special needs education services provided ⁷	6	16
Known to social services	5	14
Involved in a mentoring scheme	5	14
Known to health services	3	8
Placed on Crime Reduction in Secondary School (CRISS) scheme ⁸	3	8

Source: Data supplied by education welfare for children put on contracts during phase two.
Base: 37 valid cases.

* Respondents could choose more than one answer. Responses total more than 100%.

Antisocial behaviour at school

Of the 26 children who completed surveys,⁹ more than a third (10) had been excluded from school. Of these, just under a third (8) had been excluded between one and ten times, and one child had been excluded more than ten times. In addition, just under a third (8) had played truant from school, four of them on a regular basis.

In addition to the antisocial behaviour witnessed and documented by police and housing officers, some of the children also behaved antisocially at school (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6: Antisocial behaviour in school

Behaviour involved	Number of children	Per cent*
No problems/not known to education services	18	49
Disturb class	12	32
Abuse teachers	11	30
Poor attendance	10	27
Play truant	10	27
Other problems	8	22
Restless behaviour	6	16
Poor concentration	5	14
Throw food	3	8

Source: Data supplied by education welfare for children put on contracts during phase two.
Base: 37 valid cases.

* Respondents could choose more than one answer. Responses total more than 100%.

Motivation for committing antisocial behaviour

Practitioners, parents and children were all agreed that boredom, lack of facilities and peer pressure were the main causes of antisocial behaviour. Thirty-five per cent (9 of 26) of young people on contracts surveyed in phase two mentioned boredom and 23% (6 of 26) referred to peer pressure. Parents often stated there was nothing else for their children to do in the area. Several parents mentioned unused community halls on housing estates which they had offered to open and run youth

⁷ Children are offered a wide spectrum of additional support and interventions depending on need. Interventions include one to one support, group work and nurture classes to facilitate re-integration into mainstream schooling.

⁸ CRISS was funded under the Government's 1999 Crime Reduction Programme and involves interventions in secondary schools which seek to address bullying, exclusion, absence and truancy.

⁹ Eighteen children completed surveys during the ABC interview. A further eight children returned postal surveys to Home Office researchers.

schemes which would provide the children with a place to go in the evenings and would stop them hanging about. Practitioners also believed lack of parental control was a factor (Table 3.7).

Table 3.7: Reasons for committing antisocial behaviour

Reason	Number of practitioners	Per cent*
Boredom and lack of facilities	22	88
Peer pressure	13	52
Lack of parental control	13	52
Deprivation and low family income	3	12

Source: Interviews with police and housing officers during phase two.

Base: 25 valid cases.

* Respondents could pick more than one answer. Responses total more than 100%.

4. Impact of ABCs in Islington

KEY POINTS

- For the six months of the contract, fewer of the young people came to the attention of police or housing officers in Islington for antisocial behaviour than in the previous six months (62% prior to contract and 43% during contract). The overall number and average numbers of antisocial acts committed by young people decreased whilst on contract (from 164 to 80 antisocial acts). Forty-three per cent of the contracts were breached (40 of 94). A total of 80 antisocial acts were committed by young people whilst on contract.
- There appeared to be fewer young people committing large numbers of antisocial acts whilst on contracts, although some of the young people continued to commit a range of antisocial acts while on the scheme. There was a wide range in the number of times contracts were breached – 57% of contracts were not breached (54 of 94), 18 were breached once (19%), 11 contracts were breached twice (12%), and a further 11 contracts were breached at least three times (12%).
- Some of the young people who had committed criminal offences in the six months prior to the contract continued to do so but at a reduced rate. (There were 85 arrests prior to the contracts and 34 arrests during).
- Police and housing officers were not always aware that contracts had been breached and there were some concerns that contracts were not enforced.

A range of police and housing data were examined to assess the impact of the contracts on offending levels (criminal and antisocial) of the children involved in the Islington scheme: housing files; incident record books; police intelligence system for evidence of breaches. All breaches referred to in this chapter were identified by Home Office researchers. Housing files and police Crimint records were examined to identify all occasions where the young person on contract had engaged in behaviour that was prohibited by the terms of their ABC. These acts were classified as breaches by Home Office researchers.

Are the contracts breached?

Analysis of police, housing intelligence and the monitoring forms showed that there was evidence of some kind of breach of contract in Islington for under half of all contracts in phase one and two (43%).

Of those breached, 45% (18) breached once. Eleven people were known to have been breaching relatively consistently – three or more times (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Breaches

Number of breaches	Number	Per cent
None	54	57
1	18	19
2	11	12
3	7	7
4	2	2
5	1	1
6	1	1

Source: Police Crimint entries and housing records for contracts issued in both evaluation phases.
Base: 94 valid cases.

Are fewer acts of antisocial behaviour being committed?

For the six months of the contract, fewer of the young people came to the attention of the Islington officers for antisocial behaviour. In addition, the total overall number of antisocial acts and the

average number of acts committed by young people decreased. There also appeared to be fewer young people committing large numbers of antisocial acts (Table 4.2).

However, some of the young people on the scheme did continue to commit a range of antisocial acts. A total of 164 antisocial acts were committed in the pre-contract period, compared with 80 acts during the contract.

Table 4.2: Antisocial behaviour before and during the contracts

Number of antisocial acts committed by young people on contract	6 months before contract	6 months during contract*
None	36	54
1	28	18
2-4	21	20
5-9	6	2
10+	4	0

Source: Police Crimint entries and housing records for contracts issued in both evaluation phases.
 Base: 95 valid cases.
 * 1 case missing.

Consequences of the breaches

Agreed policy was that when a serious breach had been identified a notice of seeking possession would be served and a possession order applied for. Analysis of housing records showed that during the second period of evaluation, four notices seeking possession were served. In addition, three children were invited to a second interview where the terms and conditions of the ABC were reiterated, and seven were placed on a second ABC.

It is not clear if further action was not taken because breaches that were identified were not deemed to be serious enough by the police or housing officers responsible for monitoring the contracts to warrant further action, or, whether breaches were overlooked or not identified because of a lack of resources to effectively monitor and enforce the terms of the contracts.

Police officers discussed breaches hypothetically and defined most examples of breaches as non-serious. They were also typically ill informed about correct procedure for notices seeking possession and injunctions. They admitted they lacked confidence in these procedures. This identifies a clear training need with regard to the future implementation of ABCs and issues surrounding tackling breaches.

Interviews with police officers revealed some confusion as to what should happen when a breach was identified. Police officers thought a notice seeking possession was issued by the courts, but landlords have discretion to issue a notice seeking possession without reference to the courts and do not have to seek agreement from any external body.

Concerns were, however, raised about the consequences of not tackling serious breaches properly. Local authority housing officers feared that failure to tackle breaches might undermine the system. They believed that the lack of sanctions might encourage the young people on ABCs not to take the scheme seriously. Many local authority housing officers also felt that the contracts needed to be tougher, and police often expressed frustration that breaches were not followed up with tough enforcement action, for example notice seeking possession and injunctions. Both police and housing officers expressed concern that if breaches were not dealt with properly the scheme would cease to be effective and the children and their families would quickly realise that there was no penalty for committing antisocial behaviour.

Criminal behaviour whilst on contract

Whilst committing a criminal act was not considered by the Islington scheme to be a breach of the original terms and conditions of the ABC,¹⁰ any criminal act may be defined as antisocial in nature.

Analysis of police intelligence systems (Crimints) showed that a total of 132 criminal acts were committed by children during the six months they were placed on an ABC, an average of 1.4 per child. However, more than half (57%) did not commit any criminal acts (Table 4.3), whilst one child committed sixteen separate criminal acts. The police were aware of this criminal behaviour and any further action deemed to be appropriate was taken by them, irrespective of the ABC. The police seemed to find it easier to record and tackle these instances of criminal behaviour.

Table 4.3: Criminal acts which came to the attention of the police

Number of criminal acts by young people on contract	Number
None	52
1	14
2-4	17
5-9	7
10+	2

Source: Police Crimint entries and housing records for contracts issued in both evaluation phases.
Base: 92 valid cases.

It is important to note that 47 per cent of children (45) had no contact with the police or housing whilst they were on an ABC (Table 4.4).

A comparison of data before and during the contract period also highlights the following:

- The number of children who came to the attention of the police/housing decreased.
- The number of children who were stopped or arrested decreased (-7% and -49% respectively).

Table 4.4: Comparing stops and arrests before and during the scheme

Contact	Prior to contract	During contract
Number of children who did not come to the attention of the police/housing officers	32	45
Stops		
Number of children not stopped	53	56
Number of children stopped	42	39
Total number of stops	99	84
Arrests		
Number of children not arrested	56	75
Number of children arrested	39	20
Total number of arrests	85	34

Source: Police Crimint entries and housing records for contracts issued in both evaluation phases.
Base: 95 valid cases.

Differences between year one and year two of the scheme

A comparison of police and housing data for the first and second year of the evaluation showed differences. The number of children who breached their contract decreased during the second phase of the evaluation, although the average number of times a contract was breached increased (Table 4.5).

¹⁰ None of the contracts included not committing criminal acts as part of their terms.

Table 4.5: Comparing the number of breaches

Outcome	Year 1	Year 2
Number of children who did not breach their ABC	24	31
Number of children who breached their ABC	27	13
Total number of breaches	46	34
Percentage of contracts breached	53	30
Average number of times contracts breached	1.7	2.6
Maximum number of breaches per child	4	6

Source: Police Crimint entries and housing records for contracts issued in both evaluation phases.
Base: 95 valid cases.

The children placed on ABCs during phase two were less likely to commit criminal offences whilst on the contract than during phase one. Thirty-one children committed a total of 117 criminal acts during the first part of the evaluation, compared with nine children who committed 16 acts during the second part of the evaluation. There are fewer prolific criminal offenders on contracts by stage two of the evaluation (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6: Comparing criminal data

	Year 1	Year 2
Criminal acts		
Number of criminal acts committed	117	16
Number of children who committed criminal acts	31	9
Average number of criminal acts per child	3.8	1.8
Arrests		
Number of children arrested	14	6
Total number of arrests	26	8
Percentage of children arrested	27	14
Average number of arrests per child	1.9	1.3
Police stops		
Number of children stopped	27	12
Total number of stops	67	17
Percentage of children stopped	53	27
Average number of stops per child	2.5	1.4

Source: Police Crimint entries and housing records for contracts issued in both evaluation phases.
Base: 95 valid cases.

In year two the children on contract appear to have committed fewer criminal acts and were arrested and stopped less frequently. This might be the result of the Islington team choosing their targets more carefully. They were increasingly likely to choose children who were at risk of committing antisocial rather than criminal acts. This could explain why during phase two of the evaluation children were less likely to have been stopped or arrested by the police, but were more likely to have breached their ABC and committed an antisocial act whilst on contract.

Is antisocial behaviour displaced?

A common concern with schemes of this sort is that the young people will merely offend or behave antisocially elsewhere. Whilst no data were available to show that the antisocial behaviour had been displaced, practitioners were aware that it could be a possibility.

'It isn't possible to say that the ABC scheme is 100% successful because of displacement issues.' (Islington community contact officer)

Displacement was a particular concern when the youths were placed on contracts which were very location specific.

'One of the main worries is that most ABCs we have done are very geographical, very local to our estates. The thing that worries us is our problems will be displaced on to other estates. By the same token, other estate kids on ABCs will come on to our estates as they are not allowed to act how they have been on their own estates.' (Islington local authority housing officer)

In fact the evidence that crime is displaced as a result of preventative measures is weak (see Cornish and Clarke, 1986; Hamilton-Smith, 2002), and our evidence confirmed this. Police intelligence data showed that there was evidence of displacement in just five of the 95 contracts in both phase one and two.

The views of practitioners

All of the practitioners interviewed felt that the scheme did have an impact on the behaviour of the young people although some felt that any impact depended upon the child involved, and they advocated choosing candidates for the scheme carefully. Practitioners tended to choose potential candidates with whom they thought the contracts would work best. Success of an ABC was judged according to the number of complaints received about the child after the ABC had been issued.

'After they (housing officers) did the ABC all complaints stopped which indicates that the ABC has worked.' (Islington local authority housing officer)

The majority of practitioners (85%) felt that ABCs were a good way of tackling antisocial behaviour. Practitioners also felt that the scheme was extremely productive and an excellent step forward in dealing with antisocial behaviour.

'An ABC is cheap, easy and fairly efficient in addressing a lot of youth problems.' (Islington Registered Social Landlord)

The contracts are also a way of making the young people responsible for improving their own behaviour.

'The ABCs make youth consider their behaviour. Youths don't always consider their behaviour a problem, e.g. hanging about.' (Islington Registered Social Landlord)

According to practitioners the main benefits of the scheme were that it emphasises the council's policy on vandalism and resident abuse and makes the children responsible for their own behaviour. The ABC interview was also valued by practitioners as it provided them with a forum in which they could communicate with the child as an individual rather than as part of a gang. Several reasons were given by practitioners to justify the use of ABCs and their value (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7: Practitioners views on why ABCs work

Reason	Number of practitioners	Per cent*
Supportive parents	25	100
Attitude of children	25	100
Accepting the evidence	24	96
Threat of eviction	22	88
Fear of police	4	16

Source: Interviews with housing and police officers during phase two.

Base: 25 valid cases.

* Respondents could choose more than one answer. Responses total more than 100%.

Reasons given by practitioners for ABCs not working included parental and sibling criminality (96%), peer group (88%) and refusal to accept the evidence (28%). Practitioners who were interviewed also stated that in some situations ABCs were not appropriate, especially for use with older children and when the children are involved in criminal activity.

The scheme also made parents aware of their child's behaviour and forced them to tackle it.

'Now parents have to take notice. In the past they were just sent a letter by the council which they probably ignored.' (Islington local authority housing officer)

The ABC scheme has meant that the council now has a uniform way for dealing with antisocial behaviour among young people and it allows the council to demonstrate that they will not tolerate vandalism and abuse to residents on their estates.

5. The spread of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts in England and Wales

KEY POINTS

- In April 2002 there were at least 173 contract schemes in England and Wales and 39 of the 42 police forces surveyed had implemented at least one ABC scheme. A total of 1,868 contracts had been issued, an average of 11 contracts per scheme. However, it is likely the number of schemes and contracts issued has increased since then.
- A multi-agency approach was common, usually involving the police, housing, YOT and social services. However, contracts were typically monitored by the police and housing.
- The majority (79%) of respondents (police and housing officers) felt that the scheme was positive, and most ABC schemes were set up because of perceived successes elsewhere.
- A wide variety of data sources were used to identify potential candidates including complaints, housing records, police intelligence and police statistics. The use of professional witnesses was not very common.
- Types of antisocial behaviour targeted included harassment, verbal abuse and criminal damage. ABCs were also used to tackle crime, e.g. prostitution and joyriding.
- 45% of respondents (76 of 169) who were currently running ABC schemes reported that one or more of their contracts had been breached. In total 286 breaches were identified; 15% of all contracts issued. Most breaches involved criminal damage, verbal abuse and nuisance.
- Benefits of the scheme included addressing and reducing antisocial behaviour effectively.
- The main implementation problems were considered to be a lack of resources and time.

Since the scheme was established in Islington in 1999, ABCs have been adopted by police forces and local authorities throughout England and Wales as one of a number of tools available to tackle antisocial behaviour. The ABC is one of a raft of measures that may be used prior to an ASBO, and is often viewed as helping the individual to address their problem behaviour before applying for an ASBO. ABCs increasingly entail a multi-agency approach, as is the case in Islington. Consequently they are no longer simply a form of enforcement (via the threat of eviction). Instead, children placed on ABCs are now drawn to the attention of other statutory agencies who may also be involved in providing the family with support. The scheme provides these agencies with an opportunity for a co-ordinated and holistic approach to antisocial behaviour. ABCs are currently being used widely throughout England and Wales, often as a result of information sharing and the dissemination of good practice at seminars and conferences in recent years.

Survey of ABCs in England and Wales

In April 2002 a survey of 42 police forces in England and Wales and a random selection of half of the 380 local authorities in England and Wales was undertaken to assess the extent to which ABC schemes had been used. A total of 262 questionnaires were sent out, of which 258 were returned.

Implementing the ABC scheme

In total 173 ABC schemes were identified. On average, 11 contracts had been issued per scheme, 1,868 contracts in total. However, there was considerable variation in the number of contracts issued by each scheme, 24 schemes had no contracts whilst one scheme had issued 200.

It should be noted that since April 2002, when the survey was conducted, the number of schemes implemented, contracts issued and breaches reported is likely to have increased.

Respondents stated a number of reasons for introducing the scheme including:

- Seventy per cent (120 of 172) mentioned a positive impact elsewhere.
- Forty-two per cent (72 of 172) cited cost effectiveness.

- Thirty-two per cent (55 of 172) mentioned recommendation by colleagues.

Eighty-five respondents (33%) were not implementing a scheme. Reasons included:

- Fifty-five per cent (46 of 83) used other methods.
- Twenty-seven per cent (22 of 83) were introducing them soon.
- Fourteen per cent (12 of 83) had no antisocial behaviour.

Where are the schemes?

Of the 190 local authorities surveyed, 93 had implemented ABC schemes. The average number of schemes implemented by each local authority was 1.9. Thirty-nine of the 42 police forces questioned said that at least one BCU was using the scheme. In London, 30 of the 36 Metropolitan police boroughs replied stating they were using the scheme. There was however wide variation in terms of the number of schemes being run by the police. Whilst all the police forces who responded and were running ABC schemes were operating at least one scheme, some were operating nine different schemes in different BCUs.¹¹ The average number of schemes being run by each police force that responded was four.

The average number of schemes per government office region was 17.3, however there was wide variation from eight schemes in Wales to 30 schemes in London. There was also variation in the number of ABCs issued per government region, ranging from 40 to 552. This is probably due to the differing size of geographical area covered by each region and population density (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: ABC schemes and ABCs issued in each government region

Government office region	Number of schemes	Number of ABCs
Government Office London	30	299
Government Office South East	22	552
Government Office South West	21	112
Government Office East of England	17	83
Government Office North West	17	203
Government Office West Midlands	16	166
Government Office North East	14	241
Government Office East Midlands	14	58
Government Office Yorkshire and the Humber	14	114
National Assembly for Wales	8	40
Total	173	1,868

Source: Survey of police forces and local authorities in England and Wales.
Base: 173 valid cases.

Details about the scheme

Sixty-one per cent (102 of 168) of those operating schemes introduced the scheme to potential participants via a letter and 35% (59 of 168) invited the alleged perpetrator to an interview to discuss their behaviour. Four per cent (7 of 168) used a home visit prior to the ABC being issued.

ABCs were most commonly used to tackle harrassment (93%), verbal abuse (88%) and criminal damage (81%) (Table 5.2).

¹¹ It is possible that some BCUs did not respond because there was some confusion regarding who should fill in the survey. Non-response does not automatically imply that the BCU was not conducting a scheme. Police forces may have been operating more schemes than surveys returned.

Table 5.2: Behaviour targeted by ABC

Behaviour	Number	Per cent*
Harassment	153	93
Verbal abuse	146	88
Criminal damage	134	81
Vandalism	125	76
Noise nuisance	117	71
Graffiti	106	64
Congregating	98	59
Racial abuse	68	41
Drinking	65	39
Drugs	36	22
Joyriding	36	22
Substance misuse	32	19
Other	25	15
Smoking	21	13
Begging	10	6
Prostitution	10	6

Source: Survey of police forces and local authorities in England and Wales.

Base: 165 valid cases.

* Respondents could choose more than one type of behaviour. Responses total over 100%.

Responses to the survey showed that participants for the schemes were identified using a wide variety of data, similar to those used in Islington, e.g. complaints to the police/housing (90%), police intelligence (77%) and housing records (77%). The use of professional witnesses was least common (20%).

Multi-agency involvement

It was common for a multi-agency approach to be adopted, showing that ABCs are not simply about enforcement but can also aim to support families. Police, housing and YOT were the main agencies involved, which was also the case in Islington. However, police and housing were ultimately responsible for monitoring the contracts and identifying and tackling breaches.

Table 5.3: Agencies involved in scheme

Agency	Number	Per cent*
Police	156	91
Housing	146	85
YOT	125	73
Social services	97	56
Education	89	52
RSLs	79	46
Environmental health	41	24
Health services	25	15

Source: Survey of police forces and local authorities in England and Wales.

Base: 172 valid cases.

* Police and local authority who responded could choose more than one data source. Responses total over 100%.

Training

Sixty-one per cent of those respondents running schemes stated that training had been given to operational staff (105 of 172). For those who did receive training, it covered the definition of antisocial behaviour (84%), how to gather evidence (73%) and the value of partnership (67%). Training on how to tackle breaches (48%) and the process of monitoring contracts was least likely to be provided (31%).

Monitoring and breaches

Contracts were primarily monitored by police and housing officers, despite the multi-agency involvement. Half of all ABC schemes were monitored jointly by police and housing officers, and a third of schemes were monitored solely by the police or housing.

A wide variety of data sources were being used to monitor ABCs and identify potential breaches. In general, the same types of data were used to monitor the contracts as had been used to identify candidates initially. The use of professional witnesses was again not very common (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Data sources used to monitor contracts

Data	Number	Per cent*
Complaints	124	73
Housing records	116	69
Police intelligence	116	69
Recorded police statistics	90	53
Residents	77	46
Observation	73	43
Incident books	56	33
Home visits	55	33
Caretakers and staff	40	24
Professional witnesses	20	12
Other sources	5	3

Source: Survey of police forces and local authorities in England and Wales.

Base: 169 valid cases.

* Police and local authority who responded could choose more than one data source. Responses total over 100%.

Responses showed similarities with the Islington scheme where the main sources of evidence used were complaints and data from police and housing. Contracts were also monitored using the same data sources routinely collected by police and housing officers.

Breaches

Forty-five per cent of respondents (76 of 169) who were currently running ABC schemes reported that one or more of their contracts had been breached.

In total, 286 contract breaches had been identified (as defined by the scheme), 15% of all ABCs were breached. There was an average of 1.7 breaches per scheme and an average of 0.2 per ABC issued. However, there was a wide variation in terms of the number of breaches reported.

Table 5.5: Self-reported breaches

Number of breaches per scheme	Number	Per cent
None	93	55
1	21	12
2-4	35	21
5-9	14	8
10+	6	4

Source: Survey of police forces and local authorities in England and Wales.

Base: 169 valid cases.

Seventy respondents answered the question about what the breach involved. The most common reasons for breaches were:

- Criminal damage - 20% (14).
- Verbal abuse - 14% (10).
- Nuisance - 13% (9).

Advantages and disadvantages

Respondents who had implemented the scheme were asked why the scheme had been introduced and the perceived benefits of the scheme. The main reasons given were reducing antisocial behaviour (77%) and addressing antisocial behaviour more effectively (74%). ABCs were also considered to be cost effective (67%).

Eighty-five per cent of respondents (145 of 171) who were currently involved in an ABC scheme stated they were happy with the scheme. Just 3% (5 of 171) said they were unhappy and 12% (21 of 171) said they were unsure.

Respondents were asked what problems they had experienced or identified as a result of an ABC scheme being implemented. A lack of resources (51%) and time constraints (49%) were the main issues raised, which were fairly similar to problems and difficulties raised during interviews with police and housing officers in Islington. A third of respondents mentioned the lack of support from other agencies, and another third also referred to data problems that made monitoring ABCs and identifying breaches difficult.

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