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Tackling anti-social behaviour



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Anti-social behaviour ruins lives. It doesn't just make life unpleasant; it prevents the renewal of disadvantaged areas and creates an environment where more serious crime can take hold. It's also expensive, costing the British taxpayer £3.4bn a year.

We take all reports of anti-social behaviour very seriously and we train our staff to tackle it effectively. We will investigate and take appropriate action in cases where at least one of the parties involved is one of our residents, or the problems are affecting our residents.

What is anti-social behaviour?

The term anti-social behaviour covers a wide range of selfish and unacceptable activity that can blight the quality of life. Some anti-social behaviour is also criminal, which means we work with the police to deal with the problems.

Some examples might include:

- excessive noise
- vandalism, graffiti, and fly posting
- using the home for unlawful purposes such as growing drugs
- anti-social drinking
- reckless riding of mini motorbikes
- intimidating groups taking over public spaces
- abusive behaviour and harassment.

A legal definition of anti-social behaviour is found in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The Act describes anti-social behaviour as “acting in a manner that causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as the complainant.”

What is not anti-social behaviour?

Many things may be reported to us that are not anti-social, but still cause problems for our residents. Examples of problems that are not likely to be anti-social include:

- people walking across their floor in shoes (in flats)
- noise of children playing
- noise of day-to-day living, like washing machines running
- cooking smells
- legal parking in public areas.

Some of these problems can become anti-social behaviour, for example, if they are specifically targeted at someone over a period of time, or dependent on what time they are happening. Your housing officer will often give advice in such cases, but will make it clear when something is not being treated as anti-social behaviour.

Perceptions of anti-social behaviour

Some incidents of anti-social behaviour receive a high profile in the media and as a result, perceptions of its frequency in our communities, and attitudes towards people can be incorrect. In reality, we deal with around 500 cases of anti-social behaviour per year, from 8,000 properties, and 16,000 residents



How do we prevent it?

There are terms around anti-social behaviour contained within our tenancy agreement. The tenancy conditions that people sign are a binding agreement of their responsibilities as a tenant. These conditions are explained to all of our residents when they sign up to their tenancies and in follow up visits.

We will also try to prevent anti-social behaviour by:

- working with communities to look at what can be physically done to improve areas
- working with other organisations to provide activities that may divert people away from causing anti-social behaviour.

For more information, please see our Neighbourhood and Community Service Standard.

How do we tackle it?

Anti-social behaviour is a problem, but it is solvable. We try and stop anti-social behaviour as quickly and early as possible, but can only do

this when it is reported to us. We try and stop anti-social behaviour by:

- sending warning letters
- using mediation or other means of getting people talking to each other
- dealing with problems that the perpetrator may have that are causing the anti-social behaviour
- using acceptable behaviour contracts or family behaviour contracts
- extending a starter tenancy if we feel that an extra period of probation is required
- working with other agencies who have different powers to deal with problems.

Taking legal action or evicting someone from their home are last resorts in our process for tackling this type of behaviour. However, some cases involve such serious behaviour that we have to do this. We may apply for an injunction, sometimes in an emergency and/or with a power of arrest. In the most serious cases we will take possession action against someone's tenancy.

How do we support victims and witnesses?

The key to tackling anti-social behaviour is supporting victims of it and encouraging individuals and communities to work with us to gather accurate and detailed evidence. We will support victims and witnesses by:

- taking a victim-centred approach
- assessing the level of risk to victims and making appropriate plans to ensure their safety
- providing guidance and support, and ensure the victim's confidentiality (except where there is serious risk of harm and we have to break this)

- work with other organisations who are experts in victim support
- make sure victims and witnesses are kept up-to-date with what is happening in their case
- improving security on their homes when necessary.

Ordinarily, we will not re-house victims or perpetrators of anti-social behaviour. However, there may be exceptional circumstances where rehousing is a last resort, for example where an immediate threat to the victim or their household has been identified that cannot be removed in any other way.



What will we do if you report anti-social behaviour to us?

Any information that you give to us about anti-social behaviour incidents will be treated in confidence. We will not discuss it with anyone else unless those involved have agreed to it or unless there is a serious risk of harm, when we are obliged to take action.

Your report will be given to your neighbourhood housing officer, and an appointment will be made for them to speak to you about your report. The officer will typically see you in your home, but this is up to you. If you would prefer they could speak to you over the phone or via email, or you can meet in one of our housing offices or elsewhere.

They will:

- ask you about the problems in detail, including dates and times of specific incidents
- agree an action plan to decide the best way to resolve the problem

- keep you informed through an agreed level and method of contact – for instance, weekly phone calls or emails
- take appropriate action to resolve the case.

Your housing officer will be supported by a specialist anti-social behaviour team, who may help with the case if necessary.

The case will not be closed without speaking to you first, unless we are unable to get in contact with you. Once a case has been closed, we will gather feedback from you about your experience and how you think we have handled the case. We use this information to develop and improve our service.

For further information about what you can expect from us when you report anti-social behaviour, please see our Neighbourhood and Community Service Standard available on our website or at your housing office.

How can you report anti-social behaviour?

You can report anti-social behaviour via the below methods:

- Face-to-face, via letter, or phone to the area offices in Yate, Kingswood and Patchway
- outside office hours on **0300 123 2222**
- via email to **asb@merlinhs.co.uk**
- on our website at **www.merlinhs.co.uk**

In an emergency, dial **999** and ask for the police.



What if you are not happy with the service you have received?

We want to know when we get things wrong so we can make sure we get them right the next time. If you think you haven't received the best service from us, please let us know. Equally, if you think we've done a good job, please get in touch. There are a range of ways you can make a complaint, give us a compliment or just comment about our services. For more information, contact the customer service team at your area housing office.

We want to be an organisation that treats everyone fairly. It is vital that you let us know if you feel you have been treated differently by one of our staff because of your gender, race or ethnicity, age, sexuality or disability.

Everyone who reports ASB is given a satisfaction survey at the end of their case. We really appreciate your views as they help us make sure the service is working for you.



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