



Inspecting policing  
in the public interest



## **Anti-social Behaviour: Inspection Findings**

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## Introduction

In Spring 2010, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) carried out a review of anti-social behaviour (ASB) in England and Wales. This included asking victims about their experience of reporting ASB to the police, and inspecting the quality of the processes that forces use in tackling and responding to the problem.

Working with the Police Science Institute at Cardiff University, we then used the results to answer the question of how the police can best tackle ASB.

### What works?

Forces have the best chance to give victims a good service if they do three things:

- Brief all relevant officers and staff (including neighbourhood policing teams, officers who respond to emergencies and CID officers) regularly and thoroughly about local ASB issues.
- Regularly gather and analyse data and information about ASB places, offenders and victims in their area, and use this information to allocate resources to tackle the problems.
- Provide their neighbourhood policing teams with the right tools and resources to tackle ASB, and then monitor the plans the teams put in place to resolve local ASB issues.

HMIC have published a report for each of the 43 police forces in England and Wales setting out how well they they perform in these areas.

This report summarises those findings and those practices that Cardiff University's analysis suggested did not work, namely:

### What does not work:

- Deciding not to respond or "grading out" ASB calls.
- Giving too much emphasis to partnership processes.

Alongside this publication, HMIC have also published the findings of the victim survey, Cardiff University's analysis and an overview which brings everything together. All these publications can be found on HMIC's website.

A summary of the inspection process is set out at Annex A.

## What Works

### Briefings

What works: *brief all relevant officers and staff (including neighbourhood policing teams, officers who respond to emergencies and CID officers) regularly and thoroughly about ASB issues.*

***HMIC's inspection found that a degree of briefing was evident in all 43 forces in England and Wales but only 21 of the forces were considered to be effective at doing this regularly and thoroughly to all staff that required it.***

Informing attending staff of a caller's past history and whether the call relates to a local priority enables them to deal far more effectively with victims. However, half of forces do not routinely identify if the call relates to a local priority and then inform the attending staff.

### Analysing information to better allocate resources

What works: *regularly gather and analyse data and information about ASB, with a focus on repeat and vulnerable victims, and use this information to allocate resources to tackle the problems.*

***HMIC's inspection found 17 forces gathered and analysed data in an effective way, and with a focus on repeat victims and vulnerable victims.*** However, it should be borne in mind that, in order to carry this out meaningfully, efficient and effective ways of identifying repeat victims and vulnerable victims must be in place.

All forces now have ASB as a force priority. This is an increase from January 2010 when 20 forces cited ASB as a force priority. However, setting it as a force priority meant different things in different forces, particularly in terms of the amount of resources devoted to it, and the amount and type of data and information collected and analysed. The level of commitment to actively tackling ASB was variable.

Reliable analysis of data was hampered by inconsistent definitions of what constituted ASB, a repeat victim and a vulnerable victim. We found five different definitions of ASB being used and many differing definitions for 'repeat victim', ranging from two reports in 12 months, to four reports in a month.

Cardiff University found that those people likely to suffer the greatest harm were repeat victims and those with a long term illness, disability or infirmity. Computer systems can assist in identifying repeat callers by recognising the name, address or telephone number from a previous call. Similarly, computer systems can help to identify those callers who have, on a previous occasion, been considered vulnerable. However, callers reporting ASB, even if reporting for the first time, may well have suffered ASB previously and not reported it and may also not have been considered vulnerable previously. For that reason

computer systems that automatically identify repeat and vulnerable victims are valuable but not the entire solution. They can be supplemented by a manual trawl of computer systems, in other words, not an automatic process but involving the call handler taking time to search other systems. Consistent and thorough questioning of the caller to establish if they are a repeat or vulnerable victim is nevertheless very important.

HMIC found that 17 forces did not identify repeat victims automatically when they called. 16 of these forces attempted to 'work around' this problem by manually trawling systems or by questioning the caller, but in 14 of these it was considered not effective - either the manual search or questioning was inadequate, or it was not always carried out, for example, during busy periods.

In total, only 22 forces were able to identify repeat victims effectively at the time the call was made.

Computer systems can also automatically identify callers who, on a previous occasion, have been considered vulnerable. However, this must be supplemented by effective questioning of the caller to assess vulnerability at the time of the current call.

- 35 forces could not automatically identify callers previously considered vulnerable.
- Of those, 29 used methods to 'work around' the problem by questioning the caller, or trawling systems manually. HMIC found that these processes were effective in only 12 forces.
- Only four forces were able to identify vulnerable victims automatically and effectively question the caller and trawl systems manually where required.
- In total, only 16 forces were able to effectively identify vulnerability at the time the call was made.

***Only 13 forces were able to effectively identify both repeat victims and vulnerable victims at the time the call was made.***

The quality of analysis of ASB is reliant on the quality of the data. In general we found that all ASB reports made via telephone to control rooms and call handlers were recorded in accordance with the National Standard for Incident Recording (NSIR). However, in many forces, procedures to record reports made direct to staff, either on patrol or at station enquiry desks, and those reported via letter, email, or websites, were at best inconsistent and at worst non-existent.

## **Capability of Neighbourhood Policing Teams**

*What works: provide neighbourhood policing teams with the right tools and resources to tackle ASB, and then monitor the plans the teams put in place to resolve local ASB issues.*

In general, HMIC found neighbourhood policing teams to be made up of committed, passionate and industrious staff with a very good knowledge of their

area and the prevailing issues. However, in a small number of forces, these teams did not have a clear view of the ASB incidents in their area.

HMIC found guidance on the tools and resources available for use in 34 forces and evidence that it was in regular use in three of these forces. However, even in the absence of formal guidance, **HMIC found a range of tactics were being used to good effect in 33 forces.**

Follow up contact is a key element of tackling ASB, as it improves confidence in the police, and the likelihood that victims will report incidents in the future. HMIC found that less than half of forces ensured follow up contact with victims. However, **there was evidence that some follow up contact occurred in most forces**, but it was not generally well recorded or checked.

## What Does Not Work

### Deciding not to respond or “grading out” ASB calls.

What does not work: *the presence of a strong graded response policy, whereby calls for service from the public are risk assessed and only some are attended.*

All forces operate a graded response policy in some form in an effort to allocate resources to where they are perceived to be needed most. Most use four grades as outlined below but some have variations or use different terms to describe the grade.

#### Police Grading System

##### **Grade 1 – emergency.**

Used where the call taker considers that an ongoing incident involves a threat to life or serious injury or serious damage to property.

##### **Grade 2 – urgent.**

Used where the call taker considers that urgency is required (but not amounting to emergency response).

##### **Grade 3 – scheduled.**

Used where the call taker considers that the incident is neither an immediate nor a priority incident, but cannot be resolved without the use of police resources.

##### **Grade 4 – No requirement for use of police resources.**

Used where the call taker considers that the issue can be resolved without the need to use police resources.

Forces set their own response times for each grade depending on local factors.

#### **HMIC found:**

- ***Three forces had a policy of applying grade 2 to all ASB calls.***
- ***City of London Police, due to the low numbers of incidents, attended every call.***
- ***In 39 forces call takers assessed the risk to the victim and graded the call accordingly. However, only 13 were able to identify repeat and vulnerable victims at the time of the call.***

HMIC found that in 30 forces the training of staff who have contact with the public, in relation to ASB issues, was inconsistent and this could affect their ability to identify repeat and vulnerable victims of ASB. However in eight of those forces, call takers were given specific training.

## **Giving too much emphasis to partnership processes.**

What does not work: *adopting lengthy partnership processes in inappropriate circumstances, ie where other, quicker, action could produce a result for the victim.*

Our inspection found that all forces collaborate effectively with partners to solve problems, but 22 did not share targets or performance management processes.

***HMIC found that 20 forces were effective at sharing information with partners effectively.***

## Conclusion

<b>What works:</b>	
Brief all relevant officers and staff (including neighbourhood policing teams, officers who respond to emergencies and CID officers) regularly and thoroughly about ASB issues.	21 of the 43 forces in England and Wales were effective at doing this.
Regularly gather and analyse data and information about ASB, focussing on repeat and vulnerable victims, and use this information to allocate resources to tackle the problems.	17 forces were able to gather and analyse data effectively.
Provide neighbourhood policing teams with the right tools and resources to tackle ASB, and then monitor the plans the teams put in place to resolve local ASB issues.	A range of tactics were being used to good effect in 33 forces.
<b>What does not work:</b>	
The presence of a strong graded response policy, whereby calls for service from the public are risk assessed and only some are attended.	In 39 forces call takers assessed the risk to the victim and graded the call accordingly. However, only 13 were able to effectively identify repeat and vulnerable victims at the time of the call.
Adopting lengthy partnership processes in inappropriate circumstances, ie where other, quicker, action could produce a result for the victim.	All forces collaborate with partners. 20 forces share information with partners effectively.

# ANNEX A

## The Inspection Process

HMIC's inspection involved a review of force documents and policies, physical checking in control rooms and neighbourhood policing teams, and interviews with relevant staff.

This inspection provided a snapshot in time, and when HMIC return to this, expect to find further improvement.

A total of 38 issues, clustered under the eight themes below, were inspected in each force:

- Chief officer leadership
- Recording incidents and identifying repeat and vulnerable victims
- Responding to reports
- Analysing the problem and managing performance
- Problem solving
- Working with partners
- Follow up contact with victims



