

GreenSquare Group Residents Scrutiny Panel

Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour Inquiry

February 2011

1. Background

- 1.1 The provision of an effective service to respond to residents' complaints about anti-social behaviour is a key requirement for any registered provider.
- 1.2 Indeed the Tenant Services Authority in its Neighbourhood and Community Standard sets out the following requirements for all registered providers:

Anti-social behaviour

Required outcomes

Registered providers shall work in partnership with other public agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhoods where they own homes.

Specific expectations

Registered providers shall publish a policy on how they work with relevant partners to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB) in areas where they own properties.

In their work to prevent and address ASB, registered providers shall demonstrate:

- that tenants are made aware of their responsibilities and rights in relation to ASB*
- strong leadership, commitment and accountability on preventing and tackling ASB that reflects a shared understanding of responsibilities with other local agencies*
- a strong focus exists on preventative measures tailored towards the needs of tenants and their families*
- prompt, appropriate and decisive action is taken to deal with ASB before it escalates, which focuses on resolving the problem having regard to the full range of tools and legal powers available*
- all tenants and residents can easily report ASB, are kept informed about the status of their case where responsibility rests with the organisation and are appropriately signposted where it does not*
- provision of support to victims and witnesses*

- 1.3 In May 2010 the Residents Scrutiny Panel decided to review how the GreenSquare Group tackled anti-social behaviour with a view to making recommendations to the GreenSquare Group Board as to how this service might be improved.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 The RSP agreed terms of reference for the Inquiry in May 2010 and revised these in November 2010.
- 2.2 The RSP received a number of reports from officers about:
- how the service was provided in OCHA and Westlea
 - the performance of the service
 - the satisfaction levels with the service
- 2.3 The Panel received reports from the Managing Directors of OCHA and Westlea about the service. In addition the Panel heard from the relevant line managers for the service and also interviewed two Housing Officers to discuss the services as seen from the front line.
- 2.4 The Panel had 5 meetings to discuss the service:
- May 2010 to agree terms of reference
 - July 2010 to interview senior staff from Westlea and OCHA
 - August 2010 to review performance in tackling ASB at OCHA and Westlea
 - November 2010 to review progress
 - January 2011 to interview two Housing Officers from Westlea and OCHA

3. Context

Audit Commission inspection findings

- 3.1 The ASB service is a key service for GreenSquare Group. The only external assessment of the service was when the Audit Commission carried out an inspection for OCHA in November 2007. Although this is now out of date the inspectors reported that:

“Clear procedures are in place for dealing with anti-social behaviour (ASB). A broad range of remedies are used to tackle problems and partnership working is effective. Individual ASB cases we examined were also handled reasonably well. However, the association is not monitoring the success of its approach, service standards are underdeveloped and procedures are not being consistently followed.”

- 3.2 In Westlea there has been no Audit Commission inspection.

Resident satisfaction

- 3.4 Data supplied to the Panel suggested differential rates of resident satisfaction with the service in OCHA and Westlea with Westlea residents being more satisfied.

Resident satisfaction with ASB in OCHA (2009-10)

% very or fairly satisfied with the outcome of their ASB complaint	78%
% who found it very or fairly easy to contact a member of staff about ASB	76%
% very or fairly satisfied that they were kept informed	47%
% very or fairly satisfied with the support given	54%
Number of respondents	37

Resident satisfaction with ASB in Westlea (2009-10)

% very or fairly satisfied with the outcome of their ASB complaint	86%
% who found it very or fairly easy to contact a member of staff about ASB	90%
% very or fairly satisfied that they were kept informed	72%
% very or fairly satisfied with the support given	69%
Number of respondents	41

3.5 The most recent Balanced Scorecard (date?) has shown improved levels of satisfaction in the way ASB is dealt with OCHA reporting getting 87% and Westlea getting 77% against targets of 70%. We understand final figures for the 2010/11 year will be available in the summer.

Performance

3.6 Performance of the ASB service is usually measured in the sector through a range of performance indicators covering:

- volumes of complaints
- types of complaints
- speed of response

OCHA's Key Performance Indicators for ASB in 2009-10:

Number of new cases received	173
Number of cases closed	170
Number of on-going cases	55 pm average
Satisfaction with handling of ASB	69% against target of 70%

Westlea's Key Performance Indicators for ASB in 2009-10:

Number of new cases received	259
Number of cases closed	188
Number of on-going cases	234
Satisfaction with handling of ASB	72% against target of 70%

- 3.7 The Panel was supplied with performance monitoring data from OCHA and Westlea but there have clearly been some issues in the past with the reliability and accuracy of this information. This is being addressed through the use of the REACT monitoring software which is now being used across the Group. If the software is used consistently by OCHA and Westlea it should enable a more robust comparison of performance to be made cross the Group.

4. Detailed recommendations

- 4.1 Overall the RSP found that the service was being delivered well. The Panel's main concern throughout the Inquiry was whether the Group was doing enough to tackle persistent anti-social behaviour. There was anecdotal evidence (which is also heard at other housing associations) about long delays in taking action, failings of the courts to take ASB seriously, weaknesses in communication with residents and rehousing victims rather than tackling perpetrators.
- 4.2 The Residents Scrutiny Panel make recommendations in the following areas.

Policy and Procedures

- 4.3 It was clear from the evidence presented to the Inquiry that OCHA and Westlea continues to deliver the service in different ways. In the Panel's view it is essential that residents of the Group should have the same standard of service delivered regardless of where they live. The Group needs to ensure that the best of the policies and procedures across OCHA and Westlea are pulled together into a common ASB policy and procedure for the GreenSquare Group.

Recommendation 1

The GreenSquare Group should develop a common policy and procedure for Tackling ASB across the Group.

Staffing

- 4.4 The Panel recognised that in developing a common policy and procedure this would have other implications for the way in which the service was delivered. For example at OCHA all ASB work is carried out by Housing Officers with serious cases being escalated to CANact (an ASB service delivered in Oxford City through a partnership of the City Council, Police and other housing associations). In Westlea low level ASB work is also investigated by Housing Officers but more serious cases are passed to an in house ASB team of two officers.

- 4.5 The Panel's view, which was supported by the Housing Officers, was that the existence of an in house resource for tackling serious ASB was very helpful. In these circumstances it would seem sensible for the Group to consider establishing a similar in house ASB team at OCHA or alternatively introduce a Group ASB service for Westlea and OCHA. This would mean exiting the CANact contract in Oxford.

Recommendation 2

The GreenSquare Group should consider the introduction of an in house service for tackling serious cases of ASB in OCHA or providing Group wide service.

- 4.6 It was clear from the evidence presented by the Housing Officers that dealing with ASB now takes up a significant proportion of Housing Officers' time (as much as 50%). The Panel considered that there might be merit in exploring the possibility of detaching **all** ASB work from Housing Officers and establishing a separate Tenancy Enforcement team in OCHA and Westlea to deal with all ASB work (including low level cases).

Recommendation 3

The Group should examine the costs and benefits of establishing specialist Tenancy enforcement teams in OCHA and Westlea to deal with all aspects of ASB.

REACT and performance monitoring

- 4.7 The Panel recognises the need for consistent monitoring of performance and supports the Group wide introduction of REACT. It was clear during the Inquiry that the use of REACT had been inconsistent and the Panel was pleased that this is being addressed through compulsory training for staff.
- 4.8 However the Panel was surprised at the amount of time being spent by Housing Officers on ASB work. In their evidence to the Inquiry the Housing Officers interviewed suggested that up to 50% of their working week was being spent on ASB work. One of their concerns was that REACT is time consuming to use requiring the entry of large amounts of data for every case (this is seen as a common issue by other housing associations using this software). It was suggested that the employment of some dedicated administrative support at OCHA and Westlea to assist in the entry of REACT data would enable Housing Officers to spend more time on their patches and less time as data entry clerks.

Recommendation 4

The Group should examine the costs and benefits of alternative approaches to data entry onto REACT.

- 4.9 The Panel were also advised that in OCHA there seemed to be a different approach to handling ASB work in "Over 55" properties. This may be because this stock is in a

different team and/or that a different set of policies were being applied to this age group.

- 4.10 The Panel felt that it was important that there was a consistency of approach, management and mentoring across all types of stock and asked that this be reviewed in OCHA.

Recommendation 5

OCHA should examine how the ASB service is provided in “Over 55s” stock and ensure that the approach is consistent with other parts of the Group.

Training

- 4.11 Given that a substantial part of a Housing Officer’s role is given up to tackling Anti-Social Behaviour it appeared that there was limited training given to staff to deal more effectively with the issue. From the interviews with Housing Officers it seemed that the Group had not developed a comprehensive training package which would cover:

- policies and procedures
- use of REACT
- mediation
- counselling and support to victims
- Court procedures
- Dealing with aggressive customers
- Etc.

Recommendation 6

The Group should consider developing a comprehensive training package on tackling ASB which should be made available to all staff dealing with ASB.

Allocations and sensitive lettings

- 4.12 The Housing Officers interviewed had concerns about their lack of influence over individual allocation decisions meaning that on occasions inappropriate nominations of applicants were made to the homes the associations owned. Whilst the Panel recognised that here were limitations on the Group’s ability to control nominations there was the ability for the Group to apply “sensitive lettings polices” where there was a need to use the allocations policy to assist in reducing levels of ASB.

Recommendation 7

The Group should consider how best to enable Housing Officers to influence the development of sensitive lettings policies in particular areas and to involve them in reviewing how individual allocations were made.

Communication

4.13 Feedback from Panel members suggested that there was a concern by residents that “not enough action” was being taken the Group to tackle some serious and persistent incidents of anti-social behaviour and examples were given of incidents of which they were aware. Whilst the Panel recognised the real difficulties in obtaining evidence and persuading Courts to take action the Panel considered that the Group should consider how it might:

- improve the communication with residents about the actions being taken on individual cases;
- look at how best to ensure that residents expectations about what could be done were realistic;
- ensure residents better understood the escalation procedures where they were dissatisfied with the actions being taken by the associations.

Recommendation 8

The Group should review how it communicates with residents about individual cases of ASB, how it deals with resident expectations of ASB and its policies for enabling residents to escalate issues if they feel that ASB is not being appropriately tackled.

Intelligence

4.14 The Panel was concerned about a seeming lack of analysis of how ASB problems first arise, what the circumstances are, the ages of the complainant(s) and offender(s); whether the complainant is living alone or not; the type of accommodation they are living in; mixed-age neighbours or similar; etc. It may be that there are patterns of circumstances which are more likely to present neighbour relationship difficulties. The more we understand of the circumstances and demography of those involved, the more chance we have of finding remedies for existing problems and the more chance we have of avoiding the potential for conflict in the future.

Recommendation 9

The Group should review how it collects, analyses and disseminates intelligence on ASB issues to staff and its partners.

Support

4.15 The Panel discussed the possibility of establishing a resident support group so that the resident experiencing problems with ASB could obtain some support from other residents who are going through or who have experienced similar issues. Residents complaining about anti-social behaviour often feel quite lonely or isolated and may very much value the support of others in a similar situation.

Recommendation 10

The Group should consider establishing resident support groups for those suffering from ASB.

5. Next steps

- 5.1 This report will be submitted to a meeting of the GreenSquare Board and will be presented by two members of the Panel.
- 5.2 The response of the GreenSquare Board to the recommendations will be reported back to the next available meeting of the Residents Scrutiny Panel.

Appendix 1: Additional Performance statistics

**OCHA ASB Stats
for 09/10**

Local Authority	Alcohol related	Criminal Behaviour / Crime	Domestic Abuse	Drugs / Substance Misuse / Drug Dealing	Garden Nuisance	Hate-Related Incidents	Litter / Rubbish/ Fly - Tipping	
Vale	3	1	1	1	0		2	
Oxford City	1	6	2	4	4	2	1	
SODC		1		1	0	1	0	
WODC	1	2	1	5	0		3	
CDC		3	1	1	0		3	
Total	5	13	5	12	4	3	9	

Local Authority	Misuse of communal area or loitering	Noise	Nuisance from Vehicles	Pets and Animal Nuisance	Physical Violence	Vandalism and Damage to property	Verbal / Harassment / Intimidation / Threatening	Totals for LA's
Vale	1	3	1	4		1	15	33
Oxford City	6	34	3	6	6	5	4	84
SODC		6	1	1	1	1	2	15
WODC		1	2	3	1		5	24
CDC	1	14	1	1				25
Total	8	58	8	15	8	7	26	181

**Westlea ASB Stats
for 09/10**

Local Authority	Alcohol related	Criminal Behaviour / Crime	Domestic Abuse	Drugs / Substance Misuse / Drug Dealing	Garden Nuisance	Hate-Related Incidents	Litter / Rubbish/ Fly - Tipping	Children
North Wilts Swindon	11 1	7 2	5 1	4 2	4 0	3 0	0 0	18 0
Total	12	9	6	6	4	3	0	18

Local Authority	Misuse of communal area or loitering	Noise	Nuisance from Vehicles	Pets and Animal Nuisance	Physical Violence	Vandalism and Damage to property	Verbal / Harassment / Intimidation / Threatening	Totals for LA's
North Wilts Swindon	6 1	127 6	0 0	17 0	8 0	8 1	43 3	
Total	7	133	0	17	8	9	46	278