



House of Commons  
Committee of Public Accounts

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# Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour

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**Forty-fourth Report of Session  
2006–07**

*Report, together with formal minutes, oral and  
written evidence*

*Ordered by The House of Commons  
to be printed 9 July 2007*

## The Committee of Public Accounts

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The following were also Members of the Committee during the period of the enquiry:

Helen Goodman MP (*Labour, Bishop Auckland*)  
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### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee is Mark Etherton (Clerk), Philip Jones (Committee Assistant), Emma Sawyer (Committee Assistant), Pam Morris (Secretary), Anna Browning (Secretary), and Alex Paterson (Media Officer).

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## Summary

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Anti-social behaviour by a small proportion of individuals and families brings misery and despair to local communities. Responding to reports of anti-social behaviour in England and Wales costs government agencies around £3.4 billion a year.<sup>1</sup> There are also significant indirect costs to local communities and businesses, as well as emotional costs to victims and witnesses. In 2003 the Home Office formed the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit with an annual budget of £25 million to design and implement the Government's policy on anti-social behaviour. In September 2005 the Government announced the creation of the cross government Respect Task Force to take forward the anti-social behaviour agenda and in January 2006 the Government published the Respect Action Plan.

Anti-social behaviour measures were first introduced in the mid 1990s, and since this time more powers and measures have been added to give local authorities, the police and others a toolkit of measures with which to tackle incidents of anti-social behaviour. People's perception of the level of anti-social behaviour varies by gender, area and age, with people most likely to perceive high levels in areas of greatest social deprivation. Comparable local areas use different approaches to dealing with anti-social behaviour and there has been no comparative evaluation of the success of these approaches. Nor has there been a comprehensive evaluation of the use and success of the different measures and powers, making it difficult for the Home Office, the Respect Task Force and those dealing with anti-social behaviour to assess what works best.

On the basis of a Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General,<sup>2</sup> the Committee examined the Home Office and the Respect Task Force on evidence emerging from the sample of 893 cases of individuals receiving anti-social behaviour interventions reviewed by the National Audit Office. Of this sample, around 46% related to people aged under 18 and 54% were over 18. In the absence of central data and national evaluations, the National Audit Office had used the sample to determine the apparent impact of the intervention applied in each case, in terms of whether there was evidence of further anti-social behaviour within the period covered by the case file review, and if so, after how long and what further intervention then occurred. Some 65% of the people in the sample received only one intervention. The National Audit Office review also found, however, that a small core of people engaged repeatedly in anti-social behaviour with around 20% of their sample cases receiving over half of all interventions issued.

The Committee also questioned the Home Office about its recent disclosure that a backlog of 27,500 notifications of convictions of British citizens abroad had been passed to the Association of Chief Police Officers for checking and entering on the Police National Computer in March 2006 after being allowed to build up over several years.

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1 Home Office, *Defining and Measuring Anti-Social Behaviour*, 2004

2 C&AG's Report, *The Home Office: Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour*, HC (2006-07) 99



## Conclusions and recommendations

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1. **There are currently at least 10 different interventions available to anti-social behaviour coordinators which have been introduced piecemeal over the last ten years all with different procedures to put them in place. The Home Office is planning to increase their number further.** In the light of the low take up of some, such as the Individual Support Order, and the tendency of Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinators to use only a few measures, the Home Office should take stock of measures already on the statute book, consider whether all are necessary, and how to make them easier to understand and use at local level.
  
2. **The lack of published data on the effectiveness of different measures to combat anti-social behaviour in different situations or with different groups of people has led to variation in the extent to which local areas use the interventions available to them.** Decisions are based on local preferences and the familiarity of those in authority with the different types of measures, rather than an objective assessment of what works with different types of perpetrators. Evaluation of what works is also hampered by the lack of a standard data set on perpetrators' characteristics. To enhance the effectiveness of measures to tackle anti-social behaviour the Home Office should:
  - develop and implement nationally an evaluation system to assess the comparative effectiveness of the individual measures and powers, and the extent to which socio-economic, geographic, ethnic, and age factors influence the outcomes achieved;
  - use the data collected to provide local anti-social behaviour teams with evidence based recommendations on what works best in which circumstances; and
  - specify a standard data set to be collected by local anti-social behaviour coordinators, so that all areas collect information on the use of measures against the same set of criteria, and in particular separating out data for young children from those nearing adulthood (where the different causal factors may apply), and collecting data on warning letters issued, so as to aid data comparisons and benchmarking.
  
3. **Some 20% of anti-social behaviour cases reviewed by the National Audit Office received 55% of all interventions in the period covered by the case review, and people within this group with criminal convictions had an average of 50 each.** Rigorous enforcement of breaches of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders is essential to tackle this group together with targeted interventions aimed at the underlying causes of anti-social behaviour underpinned by a requirement for individuals to take up support. Where Orders continue to be breached cases should be prosecuted swiftly and consideration should be given to referring cases to the Crown Court for sentencing where a custodial sentence can be considered.

4. **The Home Office has encouraged local areas to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour by the enforcement of measures such as Anti-Social Behaviour Orders along with support for individuals, but in recent years, the emphasis has been mainly on enforcement.** To enhance the effectiveness of the response to anti-social behaviour, both elements are necessary and the Home Office and the Respect Task Force should:

- work with Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships to make referrals to family intervention projects and other early intervention schemes a priority in cases involving children and young people whose chaotic home life puts them at risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour;
- collate information from local areas on gaps in local area service provision, such as access to drug treatment or mental health services, to inform and action Social Exclusion Action Plan proposals, due to be published in summer 2007;
- periodically provide local anti-social behaviour co-ordinators and other community groups with details of diversionary schemes and award schemes of proven effectiveness used by other local areas to reward compliance and good behaviour, with a view to building a unified national self-help, advice and support network of local leaders who have already delivered successful community schemes;
- help overcome witnesses' and victims' fear of intimidation and retaliation by making up to date telephone support helpline numbers available through anti-social behaviour co-ordinators and police forces, and build a national support network involving local communities, the voluntary sector and "Taking a stand" award winners;
- collect and analyse data to establish whether local areas have adopted a robust and consistent approach to enforcing breaches of civil orders, including Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and Parenting Orders, and whether there are blockages preventing local areas from dealing with breaches of Orders quickly.

5. **The Home Office had not arranged for the Police National Computer to be updated for notifications of convictions for crimes committed abroad by UK citizens, allowing a backlog of some 27,500 cases to build up until updating actions commenced in 2006.** The Police National Computer is used to check the criminal records of those seeking certain types of employment, for example those seeking to work with vulnerable groups. The Department has now reported that the backlog has been eliminated and that details of all relevant offenders have now been entered on to the Police National Computer. This process identified 2,198 individuals who had been involved in the most serious types of offences or had committed crimes of a sexual nature. The UK Central Authority for the Exchange of Criminal Records needs to maintain the momentum of their efforts to trace offenders, and the Home Office should report regularly on progress in locating them and referring them to the relevant police forces.

6. **The provision of inaccurate data on perceptions of anti-social behaviour is the latest of several recent examples by the Home Office of its poor quality information systems and data.** These weaknesses have included those which led the Comptroller and Auditor General to disclaim an opinion on the Home Office's Resource Accounts for 2004–05, and the provision in 2005 and 2006 of inaccurate data on foreign national prisoners. Without reliable management information the Department can neither manage its business properly nor account for its stewardship, and it should develop a detailed Action Plan to improve the quality and accuracy of its management information and numerical data and arrange for progress to be audited.



# 1 The effectiveness of measures to tackle anti-social behaviour

1. Anti-social behaviour (**Figure 1**) impacts adversely on people's quality of life, directly by causing fear, alarm and distress to victims and witnesses, and indirectly by, for example, disrupting local businesses and public transport services.<sup>3</sup> These impacts tended to be felt more acutely by those living in 'hard pressed' or deprived areas, who were more likely to perceive high levels of anti-social behaviour, and who considered it a greater problem than those living in more affluent areas.<sup>4</sup> The British Crime Survey<sup>5</sup> shows that the percentage of the population that perceived high levels of anti-social behaviour in their local area fell from 21% in 2002–03 to 17% in 2005–06.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1: The Home Office typology of anti-social behaviour

Misuse of public space	Disregard for community/personal wellbeing	Acts directed at people	Environmental damage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Drug/substance misuse</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Taking drugs</li> <li>■ Sniffing volatile substances</li> <li>■ Discarding needles/drug paraphernalia</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ <b>Drug dealing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Crack houses</li> <li>■ Presence of dealers or users</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ <b>Street drinking</b></li> <li>■ <b>Aggressive begging</b></li> <li>■ <b>Prostitution</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Soliciting</li> <li>■ Cards in phone boxes</li> <li>■ Discarded condoms</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ <b>Kerb crawling</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Loitering</li> <li>■ Pestering residents</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ <b>Illegal campsites</b></li> <li>■ <b>Vehicle-related nuisance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Inconvenient/illegal parking</li> <li>■ Car repairs on the street/in gardens</li> <li>■ Abandoning cars</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ <b>Sexual acts</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Inappropriate sexual conduct</li> <li>■ Indecent exposure</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Noise</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Noisy neighbours</li> <li>■ Noisy cars/motorbikes</li> <li>■ Loud music</li> <li>■ Alarms (persistent ringing/malfunction)</li> <li>■ Noise from pubs/clubs</li> <li>■ Noise from business/industry</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ <b>Rowdy behaviour</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Shouting and swearing</li> <li>■ Fighting</li> <li>■ Drunken behaviour</li> <li>■ Hooliganism/loutish behaviour</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ <b>Nuisance behaviour</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Urinating in public</li> <li>■ Setting fires (not directed at specific persons/property)</li> <li>■ Inappropriate use of fireworks</li> <li>■ Throwing missiles</li> <li>■ Climbing on buildings</li> <li>■ Impeding access to communal areas</li> <li>■ Games in restricted/inappropriate areas</li> <li>■ Misuse of air guns</li> <li>■ Letting down tyres</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ <b>Hoax calls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ False calls to emergency services</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ <b>Inappropriate vehicle use</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Joyriding</li> <li>■ Racing cars</li> <li>■ Off-road motorcycling</li> <li>■ Cycling/skateboarding in pedestrian areas/footpaths</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ <b>Animal related problems</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Uncontrolled animals</li> <li>■ Dog fouling</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Intimidation/harassment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Groups of individuals making threats</li> <li>■ Verbal abuse</li> <li>■ Bullying</li> <li>■ Following people</li> <li>■ Pestering people</li> <li>■ Voyeurism</li> <li>■ Sending nasty/offensive letters</li> <li>■ Obscene/nuisance phone calls</li> <li>■ Menacing gestures</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ <b>Can be on the grounds of:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Race</li> <li>■ Sexual orientation</li> <li>■ Gender</li> <li>■ Religion</li> <li>■ Disability</li> <li>■ Age</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Criminal damage/vandalism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Graffiti</li> <li>■ Damage to bus shelters</li> <li>■ Damage to phone kiosks</li> <li>■ Damage to street furniture</li> <li>■ Damage to buildings</li> <li>■ Damage tress/plants/hedges</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ <b>Litter/rubbish</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Dropping litter/chewing gum</li> <li>■ Dumping rubbish (including in own garden)</li> <li>■ Fly-tipping</li> <li>■ Fly-posting</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

3 Q 86

4 Walker et al, *Crime in England and Wales 2005–06*, Home Office Statistical Bulletin 12/06, July 2006

5 The British Crime Survey is an annual survey which asks over 50,000 people aged over 16 in England and Wales about crimes they have experienced in the past year.

6 No national data is collected on incidence of anti-social behaviour

2. Over the past ten years the Home Office had developed many different interventions to tackle anti-social behaviour for use by a wide range of bodies (**Figure 2**). Interventions were usually applied on an escalating scale. Relatively low cost warning letters and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts were used for those engaged in less serious or less persistent anti-social behaviour whilst civil orders, including Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, Closure Orders, Individual Support Orders and Parenting Orders, were usually reserved for more serious and persistent bad behaviour. The breach of civil orders, which prohibit or mandate specified actions, was a criminal offence and could be punished by a fine or imprisonment for up to five years.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 2: A wide range of interventions are available**

Power	Imposed by	Imposed against	Effect	Effect of breach
Acceptable Behaviour Contract	Police, local housing office, schools, social services	Anyone thought to be committing anti-social behaviour	Voluntary agreement to try to curb anti-social behaviour informally, avoiding the need for an Anti-Social Behaviour Order	Agency may try to secure Anti-Social Behaviour Order and use breach of Acceptable Behaviour Contract as relevant evidence
Anti-Social Behaviour Order	Magistrates on application of police, local authorities, Registered Social Landlords, or Housing Action Trusts	Someone aged 10+ who has committed anti-social acts, where necessary to protect the public from further acts	All acts specified in the order (on discretion of magistrate) prohibited for at least two years (as specified)	Criminal offence: possible five years imprisonment
Crack House Closure Order	Magistrates on application from the police	Premises that have been used in connection with use, production or supply of Class A drugs	Premises are closed to all persons whom the court decides for up to three months	Imprisonment of up to three months and possible level 5 fine
Demoted tenancies	Court, on application of local authorities, Registered Social Landlords and Housing Action Trusts	A tenant guilty of anti-social conduct or unlawful activity	Secure or assured tenancy ended and replaced with a demoted tenancy	Possible possession proceedings, resulting in eviction
Dispersal power	The police	A group of people congregating in a designated area (which must be an area with persistent anti-social behaviour)	Police officer or Community Support Officer can require a group to disperse without evidence that it is causing anti-social behaviour	Refusal to follow the officer's directions to disperse is an offence: possible level 4 fine or three month imprisonment
Penalty Notices for Disorder	Police, Community Support Officers, other persons accredited by the Chief Constable	Anyone aged 16+ guilty of any of the listed offences, including drunkenness offences	£50 fine (recently increased from £40) for most offences; £80 for more serious offences. No criminal record	Non-payment would result in prosecution for the matter in which the notice was given
Housing Act Injunction	County or High Court, on application of Registered Social Landlords, Housing Action Trusts or local housing authorities	A person over the age of 18 who has acted anti-socially, used premises for unlawful purposes or breached the terms of their tenancy	Conduct specified in the injunction prohibited	Contempt of court: possible two years imprisonment/ unlimited fine

Power	Imposed by	Imposed against	Effect	Effect of breach
Individual Support Order	Magistrates, to accompany Anti-Social Behaviour Orders	10-17 year olds who have been given an Anti-social Behaviour Order	Aims to complement an Anti-Social Behaviour Order by addressing the causes of behaviour. Can require attendance at two sessions per week for six months	Criminal Offence: possible level 3 fine (£1,000 or £250 if child is under the age of 14 at the time of the conviction)
Parenting Contracts	Youth Offending Team	Parent of a child or young person who has been or is likely to be involved in crime or anti-social activity	Voluntary agreement by the parent to agree to the requirements of the team and by the team to support the parent	Breaching an agreement is not a criminal offence and there are no legal consequences
Parenting Order	Magistrates, to accompany an Anti-Social Behaviour Order or criminal conviction or else on application of the Youth Offending Team	Parents of anti-social children who have refused to co-operate on a voluntary basis	Emphasis is on improving parental skills through attendance at a parenting programme. Can impose other requirements	Criminal offence: possible level 3 fine (£1,000)

Source: Adapted from Home Affairs Select Committee report on Anti-Social Behaviour, 2004–05

3. Some ten years after the first anti-social behaviour measures were introduced, no national evaluation of the effectiveness of the different anti-social behaviour interventions has been undertaken. Although the Home Office had commissioned a piece of research on the effectiveness of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders in 2005 the results were inconclusive and the Home Office have not published them. The Home Office and the Respect Task Force were unable to provide information to the Committee about when those on Housing Injunctions, Parenting Contracts and Orders or Dispersal Powers had failed to meet their conditions.<sup>8</sup>

4. The Home Office had made a conscious decision not to collect extensive data centrally from local areas and Crime and Disorder Partnerships on any aspect of anti-social behaviour, preferring instead to survey local areas once a year on their use of interventions.<sup>9</sup> In the absence of comprehensive data on the use and effectiveness of interventions, local areas' different approaches to tackling anti-social behaviour cannot be evaluated effectively to broaden the range of measures applied and to provide guidance on what appears to work best in different situations. For example, no information was available on the use and effectiveness of warning letters, although the National Audit Office's work had indicated that this was the least costly, but possibly the most effective initial intervention to deter those embarking on anti-social behaviour.<sup>10</sup>

5. The Home Office and the Respect Task Force could not provide an insight into the trends underlying the use by local areas of the various powers and measures. For example, although they acknowledged the importance of providing support to young people served with Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, they did not know why take up of Individual Support

8 Qq 53, 54, 56; Ev 27

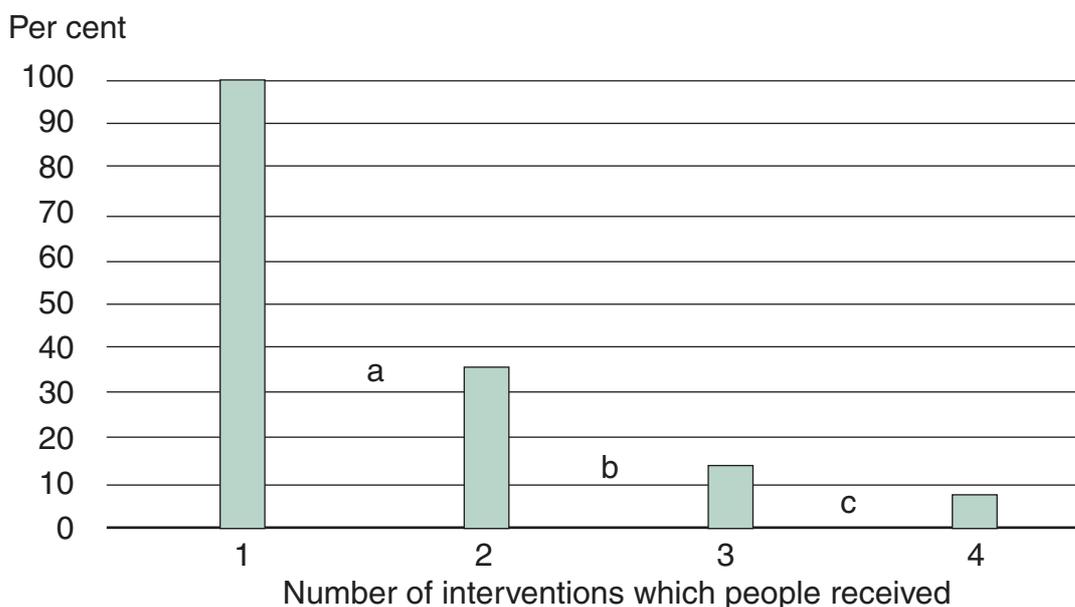
9 Qq 31,74, 75

10 Qq 13, 14, 49, 55; C&AG's Report, para 2.8

Orders, introduced in 2003, was so low: 5 in 2003–04 rising to 30 in 2004–05.<sup>11</sup> There was no standard data set in use in local areas to collect and collate data. By not collecting, collating and analysing these data nationally, the sector as a whole has no access to empirical data on intervention success rates and the impact of socio-economic and geographical factors. The Home Office accepted that more evaluation would be useful to inform local action, for example, on the best ways to tackle young children as distinct from people near adulthood.<sup>12</sup>

6. The sample of cases reviewed by the National Audit Office suggested that many individuals were responsible for relatively minor incidents of anti-social behaviour and that they desisted from such behaviour in response to one intervention (65% of the 893 individuals sampled by the National Audit Office, see **Figure 3**). The most common intervention in the National Audit Office’s sample of cases was a warning letter (54% of the sample received at least one warning letter). A hard core of perpetrators, however, went on to engage repeatedly in anti-social behaviour even after interventions. One fifth of the sample had received over half of the interventions, and within this group, those with convictions had an average of 50 convictions each. The person in the sample with the most extensive criminal record had 271 criminal convictions and had breached his Anti-Social Behaviour Order 25 times.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 3: 93% of people desisted from anti-social behaviour in the period covered by the case file review after three interventions**



Source: National Audit Office

**NOTE**

- a 65% of people desisted from anti-social behaviour after Intervention 1
- b 85% of people desisted from anti-social behaviour after Intervention 2
- c 93% of people desisted from anti-social behaviour after Intervention 3

11 Qq 157–159

12 Qq 59, 100, 113, 114

13 Qq 17, 51, 105, 148

## 2 Minimising anti-social behaviour in the community

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7. The Home Office had more recently begun to address the issue of providing support to those involved in Anti-Social Behaviour as part of a twin-track approach of providing enforcement and support. It had previously concentrated on putting in place the powers to tackle anti-social behaviour, but was now formally addressing the support needs of those involved in anti-social behaviour through the Respect Action Plan published in January 2006. Examples of supportive interventions included attendance at drug rehabilitation schemes, parenting classes or youth schemes. These could be used for individuals either at risk of becoming engaged in or already engaged in anti-social behaviour.<sup>14</sup>

8. Early intervention to address the risk of young people falling into anti-social behaviour is likely to be the most effective approach. For example, fully evaluated evidence from the Syracuse Study<sup>15</sup> of 108 deprived families in the United States, who received home visits and day care from the third trimester of pregnancy until age five, had shown that ten years after the intervention ended, 6% of the target group had been referred to probation in comparison with 22% of a control group.<sup>16</sup> In England, programmes such as Sure Start aimed to give every child the best start in life by bringing together at an early stage education, health, childcare and family support.

9. Sure Start and other early years intervention programmes are, however, most likely to be attended by children with compliant parents or carers, as take up is not mandatory. Older children at risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour were often from family units already known to the police, social workers and educational welfare officers because of their chaotic lifestyles. Support services had tended to tackle individual members of the family, for example the police in respect of a father with a criminal background, social workers for a mother with depression and educational welfare officers with a child playing truant. Under the Respect Action Plan published in 2006, 50 family intervention projects were being set up across the country to look at the whole family, taking account of all issues affecting the family such as drug taking, mental health and the relationship between the parent(s) and children, as well as seeking to prevent anti-social behaviour.<sup>17</sup>

10. Getting different services, such as mental health teams and social service departments, to address the needs of those involved in anti-social behaviour was a major challenge because of the multi-faceted response required. Being able to mobilise support services such as social services and mental health teams was critical for many anti-social behaviour co-ordinators. The Social Exclusion Action Plan, to be published in summer 2007, was expected to address gaps in services and improve responsiveness. Perpetrators could also refuse support and could not be compelled to take up support even if it was necessary to

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14 Qq 57, 97, 98

15 Greenwood, p., Model, K., Rydell, P.C., and Chiesa, J. (1998) *Diverting Children from a Life of Crime: Measuring Costs and Benefits, Rand Monograph Report*, MR-699-UCB/RC/IF, Santa Monica, USA

16 Qq 35, 37, 38

17 Qq 96, 156

address factors underlying their anti-social behaviour. The Respect Task Force was encouraging the use of Individual Support Orders and Parenting Orders which require people to take up support but the number of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders being issued with Individual Support Orders attached was still very low.<sup>18</sup>

11. The Respect Task Force was promoting a theme of encouraging and rewarding perpetrators' adherence to the terms of interventions whilst enforcing breaches rigorously. Diversionary activities, such as youth clubs, community action groups, sporting activities and vocational activities also had an important place alongside interventions to help channel people away from anti-social activities. Lack of community facilities could not, however, be an excuse for anti-social behaviour. Other local initiatives included schemes which promoted community service and neighbourhood pride, alongside less formal interventions, such as parenting classes. The Task Force could share examples of good practice. Hackney, for example, had given certificates to young people on completion of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts showing that praise could be effective in rewarding those who completed their interventions without further incidents.<sup>19</sup>

12. Victims and witnesses of anti-social behaviour may have a greater fear of intimidation and reprisal, as they often know the perpetrators and may see them daily. Special measures introduced in court had helped witnesses retain greater anonymity, but there was no national network of community advice or support services for victims or witnesses of anti-social behaviour, and local support and advice was patchy. There was a need to develop local community support networks, and the Respect Task Force had encouraged 'Taking a Stand' award winners to share their experiences. In Plymouth, for example, two award winners from Petals provided a telephone advice line.<sup>20</sup> In 2002, when our predecessors took evidence on the provision of support to victims and witnesses of crime, they recommended that the Home Office should review arrangements for providing local and specialist support to vulnerable groups and for referral between services.<sup>21</sup>

13. A relatively small core of people repeatedly engage in anti-social behaviour, causing misery and distress to local communities. Many such individuals already have criminal convictions and an Anti-Social Behaviour Order and some would be part of prolific and priority offender programmes. Powers existed to evict problem individuals or families if they were council or social housing tenants, but this had the effect of moving the problem on, rather than dealing with it. Encouraging people to accept co-ordinated support was often successful. Where people had received Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and breached these repeatedly, however, a pragmatic approach had to be taken which included returning people to court promptly and consideration of the use of custodial sentences.<sup>22</sup>

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18 Q 81; Ev 27; C&AG's Report, paras 3.6, 3.7

19 Qq 95, 103

20 Q 104

21 Qq 82, 83; Committee of Public Accounts, Seventeenth Report of Session 2001-02, *Helping Victims and Witnesses: The Work of Victim Support*, HC 635

22 C&AG's Report, Appendix 3; Qq 81, 116, 127, 146

14. Communities were frustrated and concerned by the lack of rapid action by the courts to obtain and act on breaches of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders. The Home Office was unable to provide specific information on the time taken to bring cases relating to Anti-Social Behaviour Orders to court. However, in an effort to improve the responsiveness of the courts to breaches of such Orders the Home Office had introduced 157 Anti-Social Behaviour Response Courts situated within 31 Criminal Justice Areas, together with a network of 14 specialist anti-social behaviour prosecutors. They were also disseminating best practice on the use of legal powers through Respect Action Day.<sup>23</sup> HM Courts Service has also recently published a good practice guide to help the courts deal with Anti-Social Behaviour Orders which includes consideration of methods for speeding up hearings on breaches of these Orders.<sup>24</sup>

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23 C&AG's Report, para 2.20; Ev 24-25

24 HM Courts Service, *Anti-Social Behaviour Orders Good Practice Guide*, April 2007

## 3 Addressing poor quality of information within the Home Office

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15. The Home Office made a commitment to improve data quality and introduced a new quality assurance scheme in its reform plan, published in July 2006, which aimed to improve public confidence in delivery of its core business.<sup>25</sup> Despite recognising the importance of accurate data, the Home Office provided data to the National Audit Office on perceptions of anti-social behaviour which the Home Office later admitted was incorrect and revised data was submitted in advance of our hearing.<sup>26</sup> An internal review of 160 data sets in the Home Office had identified 30 which were inadequate. These data sets were being reviewed urgently as part of the Reform plan.<sup>27</sup>

16. The Comptroller & Auditor General disclaimed an opinion on the Home Office's Resource Accounts for 2004–05 because weaknesses in the accounting system and financial management within the Home Office meant that the Department was unable to submit its accounts in time for the audit to be completed to the statutory timetable. His examination was also severely limited by the fact that the Home Office had not maintained proper books and records which would have enabled it to disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the Department.

17. Inaccurate data was also provided to this Committee in 2005 and 2006 on the release of foreign national prisoners released from custody without consideration for deportation. In July 2006 this Committee concluded that the Home Office did not have a grip on the issue of foreign nationals released from prison and not deported. It could not provide any assurance that foreign nationals were no longer being released from custody without consideration of deportation or that definitive action was being taken to improve the situation.<sup>28</sup>

18. In 2004, this Committee took evidence on a Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General on the Criminal Records Bureau (the Bureau), in which the Comptroller and Auditor General noted that the Bureau was unable to check the criminal history of British applicants during periods they had spent abroad because of difficulties in accessing overseas criminal databases.<sup>29</sup> Prior to 2005, a 1959 Council of Europe convention provided for more than 40 member states to exchange data on the criminal convictions of their citizens in other member countries, but these arrangements operated on a fragmented and piecemeal basis. In March 2006, following a 2005 European Council decision, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) was designated the mandatory central authority for mutual legal assistance for this country. The Home Office passed to ACPO a backlog of 27,500 notifications, some of which went back several years, and which had not

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25 *From Improvement to Transformation*, Home Office, July 2006, paras 44-45

26 Ev 20

27 Qq 1, 2

28 Committee of Public Accounts, Sixtieth Report of Session 2005-06, *Home Office Resource Accounts 2004-05 and follow-up on Returning failed asylum applicants*, HC 1079

29 Qq 3, 4; C&AG's Report, *Criminal Records Bureau: Delivering Safer Recruitment?* HC (2003–04) 266, para 2.14

been entered on the Police National Computer. Some 10 months later, details of just 260 of the 540 serious notifications had been entered onto the Police National Computer. On the 22 May 2007 the Department reported that the backlog has now been eliminated and that details of all relevant offenders have now been entered on to the Police National Computer. This process identified 2,198 individuals who had been involved in the most serious types of offences or had committed crimes of a sexual nature. The individuals involved in these cases have been flagged on the Violent and Sexual Offenders' Register and/or, where possible, been referred to police forces to consider monitoring. In many cases, however, the UK Central Authority for the Exchange of Criminal Records is not aware of the current location of the offender and has therefore been unable to refer them to the relevant police force.<sup>30</sup>

19. The Accounting Officer response to the Department's Capability Review in July 2006 committed the Home Office to improve urgently the quality and accuracy of its management information and numerical data. The Home Office needs to change attitudes within the Department so that problems are surfaced and addressed promptly, enabling public confidence in the Department to be rebuilt.<sup>31</sup> The Report to the Permanent Secretary as to how and why the backlog of cases had arisen identified systemic weaknesses in accountability, working practices, risk management and leadership.<sup>32</sup> These themes are being addressed as part of the Home Office Reform Plan, published in July 2006. Following the Inquiry a misconduct case was brought against one member of Home Office staff and internal disciplinary action short of dismissal was taken. We understand that lessons learned from the Inquiry are being promulgated across the Department.

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30 *Report on progress in clearing the overseas convictions backlog*, Home Office, May 2007

31 Qq 27, 28

32 *Report of the Inquiry into the handling by Home office officials of notification, by other European countries, of criminal convictions for UK citizens*, Home Office, February 2007

## Formal minutes

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**Monday 9 July 2007**

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon

Mr David Curry

Mr Ian Davidson

Mr Philip Dunne

Ian Lucas

Mr Austin Mitchell

Mr Don Touhig

### **Draft Report**

Draft Report (Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 19 read and agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations read and agreed to.

Summary read and agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Forty-fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chairman make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned until Wednesday 10 October at 3.30 pm.]

## Witnesses

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**Monday 15 January 2007**

**Sir David Normington KCB**, Permanent Secretary, Home Office, and  
**Ms Louise Casey**, Government Co-ordinator for the Respect Task Force

Ev 1

## List of written evidence

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1	Home Office	Ev 20, 24
2	National Audit Office	Ev 29
3	Barnardo's	Ev 30

## List of Reports from the Committee of Public Accounts 2006–07

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First Report	Tsunami: Provision of support for humanitarian assistance	HC 25 (Cm 7018)
Second Report	Improving literacy and numeracy in schools (Northern Ireland)	HC 108 (Cm 7035)
Third Report	Collections Management in the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland	HC 109 (Cm 7035)
Fourth Report	Gas distribution networks: Ofgem's role in their sale, restructuring and future regulation	HC 110 (Cm 7019)
Fifth Report	Postcomm and the quality of mail services	HC 111 (Cm 7018)
Sixth Report	Gaining and retaining a job: the Department for Work and Pensions support for disabled people	HC 112 (Cm 7019)
Seventh Report	Department for Work and Pensions: Using leaflets to communicate with the public about services and entitlements	HC 133 (Cm 7020)
Eighth Report	Tackling Child Obesity—First Steps	HC 157 (Cm 7020)
Ninth Report	The Paddington Health Campus Scheme	HC 244 (Cm 7076)
Tenth Report	Fines Collection	HC 245 (Cm 7020)
Eleventh Report	Supporting Small Business	HC 262 (Cm 7076)
Twelfth Report	Excess Votes 2005–06	HC 346
Thirteenth Report	Smarter Food Procurement in the Public Sector	HC 357 (Cm 7077)
Fourteenth Report	Ministry of Defence: Delivering digital tactical communications through the Bowman CIP Programme	HC 358 (Cm 7077)
Fifteenth Report	The termination of the PFI contract for the National Physical Laboratory	HC 359 (Cm 7077)
Sixteenth Report	The Provision of Out-of-Hours Care in England	HC 360 (Cm 7077)
Seventeenth Report	Financial Management of the NHS	HC 361 (Cm 7077)
Eighteenth Report	DFID: Working with Non-Governmental and other Civil Society Organisations to promote development	HC 64 (Cm 7077)
Nineteenth Report	A Foot on the Ladder: Low Cost Home Ownership Assistance	HC 134 (Cm 7077)
Twentieth Report	Department of Health: The National Programme for IT in the NHS	HC 390
Twenty-first Report	Progress in Combat Identification	HC 486 (Cm 7151)
Twenty-second Report	Tax credits	HC 487 (Cm 7151)
Twenty-third Report	The office accommodation of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and its sponsored bodies	HC 488
Twenty-fourth Report	Ofwat: Meeting the demand for water	HC 286 (Cm 7151)
Twenty-fifth Report	Update on PFI debt refinancing and the PFI equity market	HC 158
Twenty-sixth Report	Department for Work and Pensions: Progress in tackling pensioner poverty—encouraging take-up of entitlements	HC 169
Twenty-seventh Report	Delivering successful IT-enabled business change	HC 113
Twenty-eighth Report	ASPIRE—the re-competition of outsourced IT services	HC 179
Twenty-ninth Report	Department of Health: Improving the use of temporary nursing staff in NHS acute and foundation trusts	HC 142
Thirtieth Report	The Modernisation of the West Coast Main Line	HC 189
Thirty-first Report	Central government's use of consultants	HC 309
Thirty-second Report	The right of access to open countryside	HC 91
Thirty-third Report	Assessing the value for money of OGCbuying.solutions	HC 275
Thirty-fourth Report	Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces	HC 43
Thirty-fifth Report	BBC outsourcing: the contract between the BBC and Siemens Business Service	HC 118
Thirty-sixth Report	Reserve Forces	HC 729

Thirty-seventh Report	Child Support Agency: Implementation of the Child Support Reforms	HC 812
Thirty-eighth Report	Sure Start Children's Centres	HC 261
Thirty-ninth Report	Preparations for the London Olympic and Paralympic Games—risk assessment and management	HC 377
Fortieth Report	Dr Foster Intelligence: A joint venture between the Information Centre and Dr Foster LLP	HC 368
Forty-first Report	Improving procurement in further education colleges in England	HC 477
Forty-second Report	The Shareholder Executive and Public Sector Businesses	HC 409
Forty-third Report	The Restructuring of British Energy	HC 892
Forty-fourth Report	Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour	HC 246

The reference number of the Treasury Minute to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number