



Research Note

December 2009

Briefing Note 8

PERCEPTIONS OF ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN SANDWELL

Anti-social behaviour (or ASB) covers a wide range of activity that intimidates or threatens a person or damages their quality of life. Examples include: rowdy, noisy behaviour; 'yobbish' behaviour; vandalism; graffiti and fly-posting; dealing or buying drugs on the street; fly-tipping rubbish; aggressive begging; street drinking or setting off fireworks late at night. Anti-social behaviour doesn't just make life unpleasant - it holds back the regeneration of disadvantaged areas and creates an environment where more serious crime can take hold.

Residents' perceptions of anti-social behaviour are measured in a number of ways through various quantitative surveys. This briefing aims to explore the results of these surveys available at the Borough level. The British Crime Survey¹ (BCS), which is a well-established study and one of the largest social research surveys conducted in England and Wales produces results at the West Midlands Police Force level, so this will not be included in this briefing. However, other surveys that do provide Sandwell level data (or below) are:

1. The Feeling the Difference Survey² gives results down to the Police Operational Command Unit³ (OCU) level. This survey has been conducted across the West Midlands Police force Area since April 2004. This briefing includes results from Waves 19 – 22, carried out between October 2008 and August 2009.

¹ The BCS currently interviews over 51,000 people aged 16 or over in England and Wales every year.

² Each year 21,000 people are interviewed to find out what they think about policing and community safety in their area. The survey is mainly carried out at home, but is supplemented by some on-street surveys of non-residents.

³ There are currently 21 of these in the West Midlands Police Force area – this is changing as part of Programme Paragon. For example, Sandwell will form one Local Policing Unit (LPU) from April 2010.



2. Statutory surveys such as the Local Government User Satisfaction Survey⁴ (LGUSS) and Place Survey. These are postal surveys carried out by the Local Authority, which must achieve at least 1,100 responses.
3. Five Anti-social Behaviour and Liveability Surveys⁵ have been carried out by Safer Sandwell Partnership since 2006. The first three of these surveys were carried out every six months, but the frequency has now changed to an annual basis. For each wave of the survey, around 6,200 residents are interviewed over the telephone, allowing analysis of the data at a Borough, Town and police neighbourhood level.

Focus of Public Concern

Local surveys have found *rubbish and litter lying around* and *teenagers hanging around* are of key concern to residents. Concerns over the various facets of anti-social behaviour appear to be rising.

According to the 2009 Anti-social behaviour and Liveability Survey, rubbish and litter lying around remains the largest *environmental* concern that Sandwell residents find to be a problem, although there has been a slight fall in the level of concern over the last year. All other environmental issues (with the exception of litter) have become more of a problem to respondents since the 2008 survey.

- It is people living in Smethwick who are most likely to say that litter is a very or fairly big problem. Smethwick residents are also concerned about fly tipping - suggesting that problems with litter need to be addressed in the town.

There has also been a considerable increase in the proportion of respondents who feel that *drug and alcohol* issues are a problem compared with the previous survey, and this also represents an overall increase since the first survey in 2006. There was a similar change in the proportion of respondents reporting that they felt *behaviour* issues are a problem – one in four respondents cited teenagers hanging around on streets as a problem.

Over half of respondents tell us that they use the borough's parks and open spaces, a similar proportion to the last survey.

- Those residents who use parks believe that key anti-social behaviour issues are more of a problem than they were a year ago.
- Environmental issues in parks (such as litter, broken glass, vandalism/graffiti and dog fouling) are of the greatest concern to residents.
- The majority of people who choose not to use parks, do so out of a lack of interest. However almost 20% of non-users state they don't feel safe in parks or feel intimidation from youths.

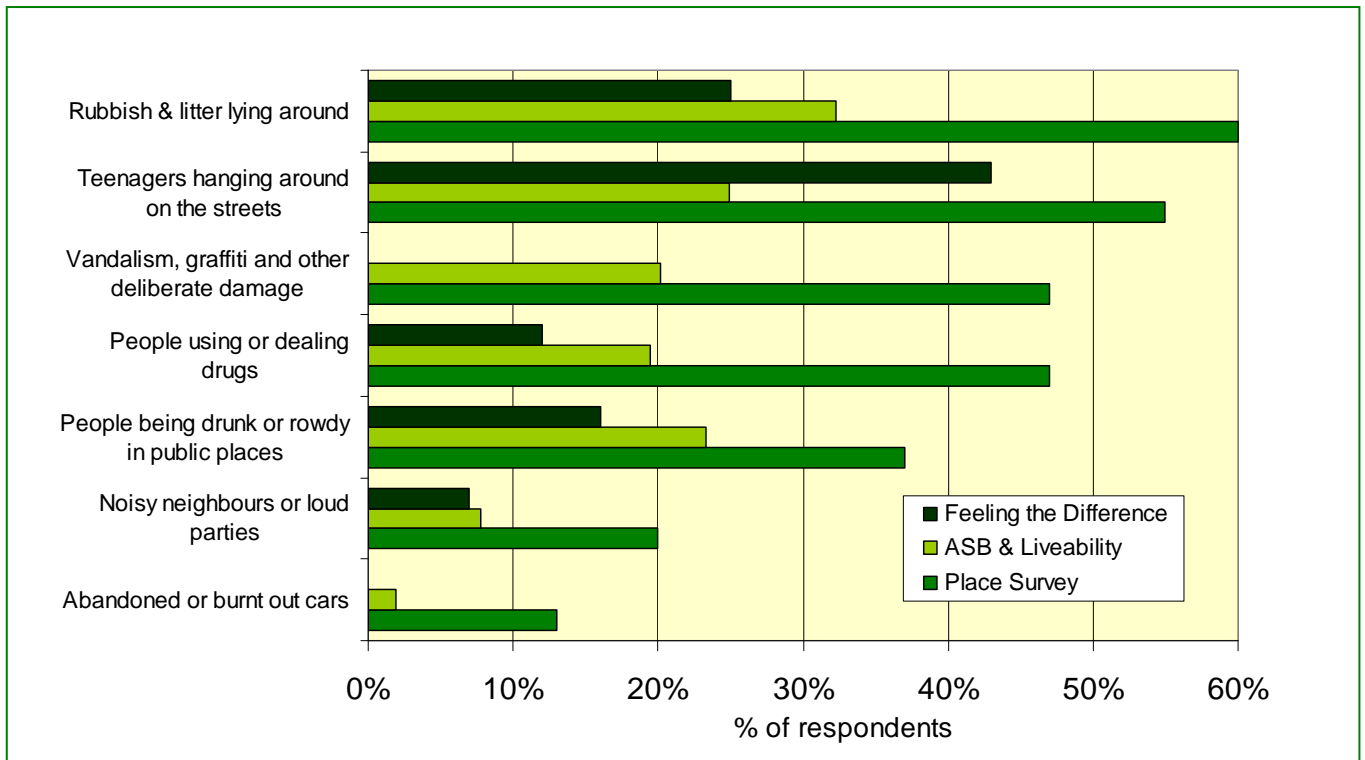
The Feeling the Difference Survey asked respondents to report what the five biggest crime and anti-social behaviour problems in their neighbourhood were. Those issues rated most highly were *teenagers hanging around* (43%), *traffic offences* (26%) and *rubbish or litter lying around* (25%). Both rubbish and teenagers hanging around were also cited as key problems by respondents to the 2009 ASB & Liveability Survey.

⁴ The LGUSS forms part of a suite of Best Value surveys carried out by all local authorities since 2002. In 2008/9 this was replaced by the Place Survey. Sandwell's Place Survey achieved 1,545 responses.

⁵ Surveys were carried out during June-August in 2006, 2007, 2008 & 2009, and in January-March in 2007.

The Place Survey asked respondents if seven different ASB issues were a problem in their local area (see Graph 1 below). 60% of residents felt that *rubbish and litter lying around* were a problem, and 55% felt that *teenagers hanging around on the streets* were a problem – both of which match the issues raised by the other surveys. *Vandalism and graffiti* and *people using or dealing drugs* are both thought to be a problem by 47% of respondents. NI 42⁶ *perception of drug use or drug dealing as a problem* ranks Sandwell as 10th worst out of 69 Metropolitan and London Boroughs.

Graph 1: Perceptions of ASB issues as a problem



Perceptions of ASB Overall

Although, due to differences in methodology, it is hard to quantify the level of concern over ASB, local surveys do tend to show that concern is rising.

A government indicator, known as the “Respect” Indicator, measures the level of concern with seven key aspects of ASB⁷. Whilst the ASB & Liveability surveys show that there has been a steady increase in the proportion of respondents who perceive a high level of ASB in the borough, rising from 1.4% in March 2007 to 6.1% in September 2009, this proportion is still relatively low.

- This suggests that although concerns over various aspects of ASB seem to be rising, people are not necessarily suffering multiple problems.

⁶ The Place Survey collects 18 of the 188 national indicators (NIs) prioritised by government. These indicators are common to all areas. Government requires local authorities and their partners to monitor all indicators in order to measure progress made in meeting key quality of life priorities.

⁷ The ratings for the seven aspects are scored as ‘very big problem’ = 3, ‘fairly big problem’ = 2, ‘not a very big problem’ = 1. The maximum score for the 7 questions is 21, and the percentage reported (i.e. those with high perceived levels of ASB) is based on the proportion of respondents who score 11 or more on this scale.

- However the survey also found that almost one in five Sandwell residents have been affected by some form of anti-social behaviour in the last 12 months – compared with only 10% in 2008. This increased incidence will directly affect residents’ perceptions.
- 16% of respondents to the Feeling the Difference Survey felt that anti-social behaviour had increased in their neighbourhood.

The results of the ASB and Liveability Surveys do, however, vary considerably from those of the Local Government User Satisfaction Survey (LGUSS) carried out in September 2006 and the Place Survey in 2008. This shows that the perception of anti-social behaviour in Sandwell has risen considerably since the 2006 LGUSS, when 28% of respondents perceived there to be a high level of anti-social behaviour, to 34% in 2008.⁸

- The Place Survey ranks Sandwell as the 7th worst out of 69 Metropolitan and London Boroughs on this indicator.

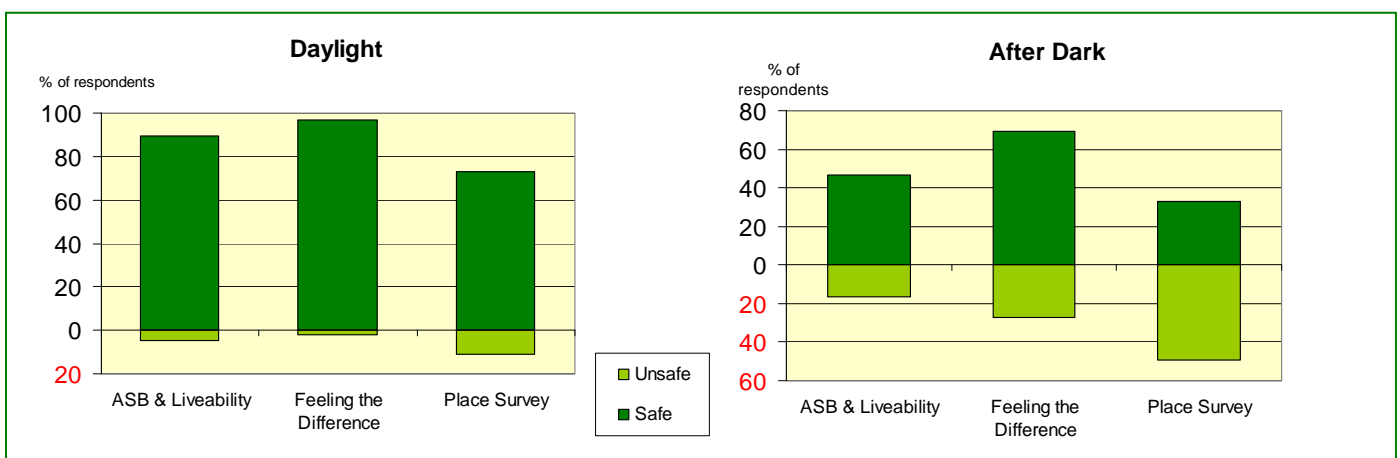
Perceptions of Safety

Local surveys show that residents feel generally safe walking outside in their local neighbourhood *during the day*, but less so *after dark*.

Despite the apparent concern over ASB issues, all three surveys found that respondents generally feel safe during the day in their local neighbourhood – over 90% of respondents to the 2009 ASB & Liveability and the Feeling the Difference Surveys said they feel safe when outside in their neighbourhood during the day, whilst almost three quarters of Place Survey respondents said they felt safe during the day.

The Feeling the Difference Survey also found that 69% of respondents felt safe after dark, considerably higher than the 46% reported by the ASB survey – however a much higher proportion (than reported by the ASB Survey) feel unsafe after dark - 1 in 4 respondents. Only a third of Place Survey respondents said they felt safe after dark – and almost half said they felt unsafe after dark (see Graph 2). Of most concern is Smethwick, where only 30% of respondents felt safe after dark, and 54% felt unsafe.

Graph 2: Perceptions of Safety



⁸ This difference is to some extent explained by the different methodologies used by the two surveys. The ASB & Liveability Survey employs a telephone methodology, whilst the LGUSS & Place Survey use a postal methodology. Research shows that respondents are generally more positive when speaking directly to an interviewer, whilst self-selecting methods such as postal surveys can generate more negative feedback.

According to the ASB & Liveability Survey, almost a third of respondents don't go out alone after dark, and of these 43% said it was because they were too scared to go out.

- Whilst the proportion of people who feel safe during daylight has increased since the first survey in 2006, the proportion who feel unsafe has also increased.
- Of all the towns, people in West Bromwich feel the least safe walking alone in their neighbourhood when it's dark, with only 44% of respondents saying they feel very or fairly safe. This compares with just over 48% in Wednesbury and Rowley Regis. This variation is not as wide as in past years.

Responding to ASB Concerns

Respondents are satisfied with efforts to tackle ASB in their neighbourhood and in the level of service provided by the Police, but it is not clear if these efforts are actually considered to be successful.

The 2009 ASB & Liveability Survey shows that around 60% of residents are satisfied with the Council's, Police's and other organisations' efforts to tackle anti-social behaviour, compared to 61% in the 2008 survey. Over 60% of Wednesbury and Rowley Regis residents are satisfied with efforts, whilst those in Smethwick are least satisfied.

- Since the 2006 survey, the proportion who are satisfied with efforts to tackle ASB has increased, whilst the proportion dissatisfied has decreased.
- The Feeling the Difference Survey found that 80% of residents agree that the police and local councils are dealing with the anti-social behaviour and crime issues that matter in this area.

The Place Survey provides the figure for NI 21 *Dealing with local concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime by the local council and police*. This indicator is reported as 21% of respondents agree that the police and other local public services are successfully dealing with ASB and crime in their local area – so this goes beyond whether residents feel organisations are dealing with ASB locally, to whether these efforts are actually deemed successful. Sandwell ranks ninth lowest on this indicator out of 69 metropolitan and London Boroughs, suggesting that improvements could be made.

When asked what initiatives are successful in addressing anti-social behaviour in Sandwell, the overwhelming view by ASB & Liveability Survey respondents is that *more police patrols* are successful in tackling anti-social behaviour, with over two-thirds of people saying this is successful – although the difference between this type of initiative and the next most "successful" is less pronounced than in previous surveys. The next two most effective initiatives are those which deal with young people – *more activities for young people*, and *better control over children by parents*.

- 7% of respondents feel that none of the listed initiatives are successful in addressing anti-social behaviour in Sandwell, and perhaps rather worryingly, several initiatives have seen a fall in the proportion of respondents that feel they are successful. However, there have been large increases in the proportion of respondents who feel the ASB Hotline and local neighbourhood offices are successful.

Table 1: Which of the following initiatives do you think are successful in addressing ASB in Sandwell?

	Sep. 2007 %	Sep. 2008 %	Sep. 2009 %	Change Sep. 07/ Sep. 09 %
More Police patrols	71.1	67.5	66.8	-4.3
More activities for young people	53.4	40.7	54.1	+0.7
Better control over children by parents	51.1	28.1	51.8	+0.7
Sandwell Council Wardens patrols	35.4	27.3	44.9	+9.5
Enforcement action by police	48.0	21.3	46.0	-2.0
Enforcement action by the Council	44.7	15.2	42.6	-2.1
Enforcement action by other agencies	39.9	12.7	38.3	-1.6
ASB Hotline	16.7	10.6	33.0	+16.3
Local neighbourhood offices	20.3	9.6	32.4	+12.1
None of these	14.7	9.2	6.8	-7.9

Source: ASB & Liveability Surveys

Although ASB & Liveability Survey respondents say *more police patrols* are successful in addressing anti-social behaviour, the Feeling the Difference Survey shows that 86% of Sandwell respondents are satisfied with the overall level of service provided by West Midlands Police. This represents a small fall since waves 18-21 of the survey, when 88% were satisfied. Almost two-thirds of respondents are satisfied with the level of foot patrol in their neighbourhood. This survey also posed a number of public perception statements relating to effectiveness in dealing with crime:

- 87% of Sandwell respondents agreed that the police can be relied on to be there when you need them.
- 88% agreed that the police deal with things that matter to this community.
- And 88% agreed that taking everything into account they have confidence in the police in this area.

Engagement with the Community

The need to keep people informed is clear – satisfaction levels with efforts to tackle ASB rise as residents feel better informed.

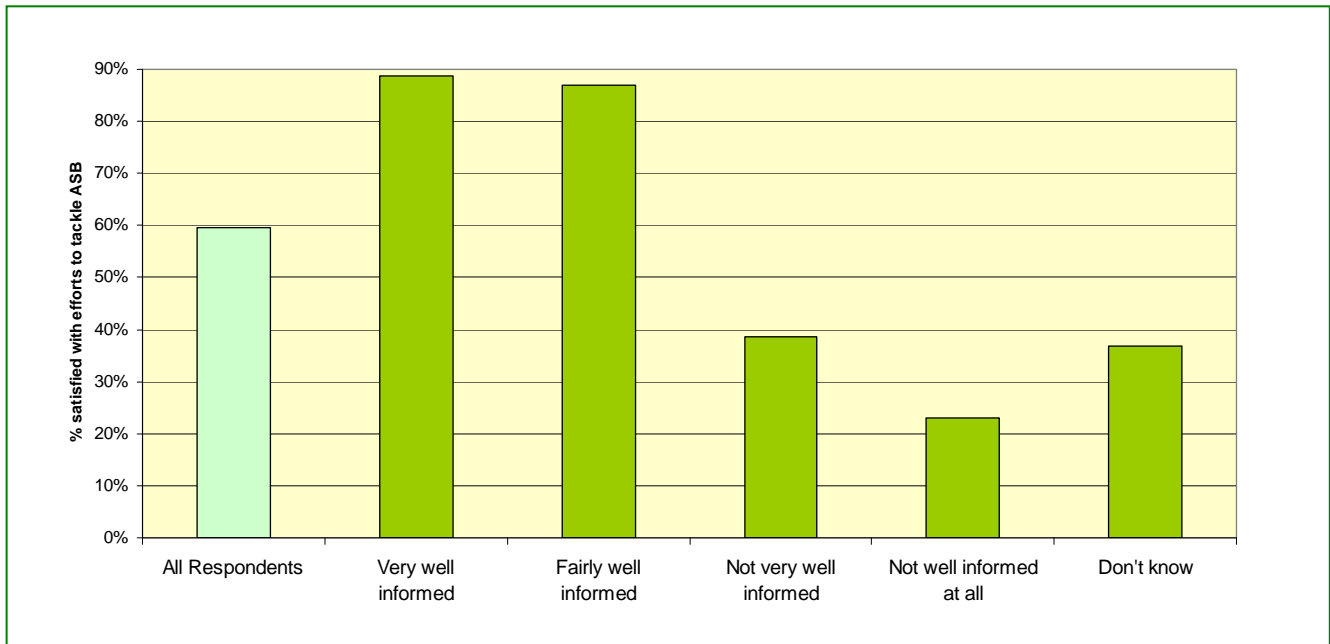
The Feeling the Difference Survey asked respondents to rate their level of agreement with specific statements associated with confidence in the police. One of these statements can be linked with the theme of engagement with the community – and in Sandwell 89% of residents agree that the police *understand* the issues affecting this community.

The Place Survey asks a similar question, which provides data for NI 27 *Understanding of local concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime by the local council and police*. In Sandwell, 24% of respondents agree that the police and other local public services seek people's views about ASB and crime in their local area, which is markedly different to the Feeling the Difference results (again in part due to differences in methodology). However, this is only slightly below the national average (and ranks relatively well compared with other metropolitan and London boroughs).

According to the ASB & Liveability Surveys, the proportion who feel informed about what is being done to tackle ASB has increased slightly since 2006, whilst there has been a small fall in those not feeling informed.

- The 2009 Survey found that just over half of respondents felt informed, whilst 43% felt *not very well informed* or *not informed at all*.

Graph 3: How satisfied are you with the council's, police's and other organisations' efforts to tackle anti-social behaviour? (By how well informed you are about those efforts)



Source: ASB & Liveability Survey 2009

Satisfaction levels with efforts to deal with ASB are closely linked to how well informed people feel about what the Council, Police & other organisations are doing to tackle the issue (see Graph 3). The 2009 ASB & Liveability Survey found that around 90% of those respondents who feel very or fairly well informed are satisfied with organisations' efforts to tackle ASB in Sandwell. This compares with only 39% of those who say they are not very well informed, and 23% who are not well informed at all.

- Residents of Smethwick feel less well informed about what the council, police and other organisations are doing to tackle anti-social behaviour, whilst those in Wednesbury feel relatively well informed. This links closely with the satisfaction levels apparent in these towns – those who feel better informed are more satisfied.
- Over a third of ASB & Liveability Survey respondents are unable to recall seeing any type of communication dealing with ASB work in the last 12 months.
- It is also evident that the more people feel they can influence local decisions then the more satisfied they are with our efforts to tackle anti-social behaviour. However, the Place Survey found that only 3.2% of residents have been members of a decision-making group set up to tackle local crime problems.
- The Place Survey results also demonstrate the need to keep in touch with residents – satisfaction levels rise with all public services, as people feel more informed.

Conclusions

Whilst the various surveys carried out in Sandwell often result in vastly different figures for similar questions, the general patterns remain the same:

- *Rubbish and litter lying around* and *teenagers hanging around* are of key concern to residents. Concerns over the various facets of anti-social behaviour appear to be rising.
- Respondents feel generally safe walking outside in their local neighbourhood *during the day*, but less so *after dark*.
- Respondents are satisfied with efforts to tackle ASB in their neighbourhood, but it is not clear if these efforts are actually considered to be successful.
- The need to keep people informed is clear – satisfaction levels with public services in general, and with efforts to tackle ASB in particular, rise as residents feel better informed.
- As well as keeping people informed, there is a real need to actively engage residents and involve them in local decision-making.

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