

# Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee

## Review of Complex ASB – 2023/24

### Developing recommendations

- Recommendations should be “SMART” and linked to specific evidence. 5-10 is ideal.
- The Committee can form other conclusions and observations to be included in the final report.
  - **S**pecific
  - **M**easurable
  - **A**chievable
  - **R**elevant
  - **T**ime-bound

## Conclusion:

- Islington Council should aspire to take a “public health” approach to anti-social behaviour, focused on early intervention, robust use of data and reducing risk and harm. The evidence received by the committee has highlighted areas of good practice in the council’s work to respond to complex anti-social behaviour, and the following recommendations are intended to help further develop this work.

# Theme: Housing

## Recommendation 1

- **Evidence:** The Committee received evidence on the proposed restructure to housing services which will result in smaller caseloads for housing officers, allowing officers to work on a more local “patch”, and with less transfer of cases between teams. It is thought that this structure will improve relationships between residents and their housing officer, supporting the early identification and intervention in ASB issues, and provide more opportunities for issues to be dealt with before they escalate.
- **Recommendation A:** Housing Operations should complete the review of the officer structure. The intended outcome being a service that promotes and facilitates early intervention in anti-social behaviour issues. Housing officers having smaller caseloads and a more localised focus will help to build trust with residents, and allowing residents direct access to their Housing Officer will help to improve outcomes and empower our residents.
- **Recommendation B:** All services involved in preventing and responding to ASB should review their capacity for carrying out early intervention work and consider if resources are deployed effectively to deliver this aim.

# Theme: Housing

## Recommendation 2

- **Evidence:** The Committee heard from both Council Officers and Housing Associations about the escalating level of need in general needs housing. Due to the severity of the housing crisis, an increasing number of new council and social housing tenancies were made to those with very challenging personal circumstances. Islington has a relatively high prevalence of mental health issues and drug/alcohol misuse in comparison to other London boroughs. There is limited supply of supported accommodation in the borough, and general needs housing providers have limited capacity to support to those with complex needs.
- **Recommendation A:** The Council should review if Islington has the right mix and supply of supported living options in the borough. If needed, pathways and resources should be put in place to best to support those with complex needs.
- **Recommendation B:** The Council should consider offering enhanced wrap-around housing support to new tenants, particularly in the early months of their tenancy, and in cases where tenants are already known to other services, or where ASB has been a factor in previous tenancies. This early intervention approach should help tenants to embed into their local community, live independently, and help them navigate local services as required. This would allow any tenancy and ASB issues to be identified and addressed at an early stage.

# Theme: Housing

## Recommendation 3

- **Evidence:** The Committee heard evidence on the importance of strong and resilient communities. Residents reported that they often did not know their neighbours and did not always feel comfortable speaking to them about low-level ASB issues. The Council does offer mediation in neighbour disputes, but it was reported that this is most effective at an early stage, before issues escalate and become entrenched.
- **Recommendation:** The Committee recognises the importance of building strong and resilient local communities as a way of preventing ASB issues, identifying issues at an early stage, and ensuing support and intervention is appropriately targeted. The Council should investigate if additional funding should be made available to estates, in the same way as the Thriving Neighbourhoods programme, to not only improve the built environment on estates, but to develop community initiatives. This may be particularly helpful in bringing communities together as part of the response to long-standing ASB issues on estates.

# Theme: Relations with stakeholders

## Recommendation 4

- **Evidence:** The Committee heard evidence of how the council works with Housing Associations on ASB issues, however also heard examples of where these relationships could be developed further. For example, Housing Associations reported that information from the council on the needs and circumstances of new tenants could sometimes lack detail, and this meant that Housing Associations were not able to provide appropriate support to tenants with additional needs. Similarly, the committee heard that some housing associations would not routinely engage in the MARAC process when their tenant was perpetrating ASB.
- **Recommendation:** The Council should develop information sharing and partnership working agreements with housing associations around ASB issues. This will enable housing providers and other services to target additional support to tenants at an early stage, working to prevent ASB where possible, and allow for cases of ASB to be dealt with more holistically.

# Theme: Data and Systems

## Recommendation 5

- **Evidence:** The Committee heard evidence of the key systems used to report and manage ASB being outdated. A new and improved online reporting tool is being developed. The Committee also heard that the Community Safety Team is reliant on manual logging of cases. It is thought that improved systems that made use of data flows and linked to other council systems would enhance the work of services, increase productivity, and ultimately provide better services for residents.
- **Recommendation:** The Council should invest in improving the systems used to report, manage and monitor ASB issues. This will allow officer resources to be deployed more efficiently in responding to ASB issues. The Committee would like to see a clear scope and timeline for this improvement work.

# Theme: Communications and working with residents

## Recommendation 6

- **Evidence:** The Committee heard from residents that people are unclear of ASB definitions, what is a Council or Police matter, which is the right agency to report to, how to report ASB, what evidence will be needed, and what to expect from the Council in response. In the evidence session with residents, council tenants asked for a clear matrix of different types of ASB, explaining how to report and setting expectations around the response.
- **Recommendation:** The Council should produce and distribute information to all residents with clear definitions of ASB; how to report ASB; why it is important to report ASB; which agency will respond; and to set expectations around communications and response times. This could also include advice on how to engage with neighbours, how the council supports residents with mental health and substance misuse issues, and advice on how residents experiencing ASB can access help to support their own wellbeing. This information should be available in a variety of formats and a clear communications plan should be developed, with regular ongoing communications and dedicated resources.

# Theme: Communications and working with residents

## Recommendation 7

- **Evidence:** The Committee heard evidence from residents that they were unclear what would happen when they reported ASB. Some residents did not have a clear understanding of what might happen when they report ASB, what enforcement action might look like, or how long it would take. The Committee also understands that sensitive personal data cannot be shared with neighbours.
- **Recommendation A:** When responding to ASB issues, the Council should send clear communications to residents to outline what is likely to happen in response, and explain what information can and cannot be shared. This should also explain when further reports should be made, and why it is helpful to continue to report issues.
- **Recommendation B:** The Council should develop training for councillors, TRAs, community groups, and other local organisations to explain definitions of ASB, reporting mechanisms, issues around information disclosure, and expected responses. This will help those in community leadership positions to signpost to relevant services.

# Theme: Early Intervention

## Recommendation 8

- **Evidence:** The Committee received evidence on the MARAC process and the Chair observed a complex MARAC session. This demonstrated good practice in agencies coming together and working holistically to resolve complex ASB issues. The Committee also heard about the new model of neighbourhood policing, proposals to restructure housing services so officers have a smaller and more local caseload, and the work of the Community Safety team in monitoring local ASB issues. There may be learning from the MARAC process that could be applied at an earlier stage to intervene in local ASB issues before they escalate.
- **Recommendation:** The Council should develop a process of holding local ward level / early intervention multi-agency ASB boards to review and respond to ASB issues before they escalate and reach the threshold for MARAC. Taking a multi-agency approach at an earlier stage should enable a more comprehensive local response.

# Theme: Early Intervention

## Recommendation 9

- **Evidence:** The Committee heard about the complexity of cuckooing cases and concerns from officers that this was becoming a commonplace issue. While the committee heard how the council and police works together to address cuckooing issues, however often this is only after significant disruption to local residents.
- **Recommendation:** The Council should develop an early intervention pathway for cuckooing cases. This could include a dedicated support worker who can monitor cases and offer support to individuals who have previously been cuckooed.

## The following are not recommendations, but are intended to be covered in the final report

- Getting the right balance between enforcement and engagement.
- The need to monitor take-up of drug and alcohol services, considering that Islington has higher prevalence than many other London boroughs.
- The importance of building strong and resilient communities.
- Equalities issues – all communities must have the confidence to report ASB issues and trust that action will be taken.
- Recognition that the council has been evolving and adapting its approach to ASB over the past year.