

ASB Scrutiny Enquiry - Victim Support Response

How do you feel about Anti-Social Behaviour in Swansea?

It is my belief that there is definitely an issue with ASB. I support many service users within the Swansea area and have heard their personal experiences and how they have been affected. I am often told by service users that there is often little or no support or they are unaware of any help that they may be entitled to. My service users have expressed their frustration at this and often feel that they have nowhere to turn. The anxiety and drip effect can be torture for the person living with it and the victim often adapts their day to accommodate the perpetrator.

The issues are prevalent with neighbours, as well as within the town centre. I feel as though ASB has increased over the last few months, consequently leaving service users feeling intimidated and vulnerable when entering the city centre. Some service users have informed us that they will avoid particular areas of the town centre and have changed their routines to only enter the city at certain times. (This is more so the older and more vulnerable service users)

It is often not seen as a 'priority' amongst the list of crimes that SWP are having to respond to in Swansea. ASB is often very difficult to evidence and can be perceived as an 'invisible' crime as perpetrators are often not caught in the act, nor leave behind a trail of evidence. Although we experience high levels of referrals of ASB for the Swansea area I do feel that there is an equally high proportion of ASB in the city going unreported.

Do you believe it is dealt with appropriately and effectively in Swansea?

Through experience of supporting service users I can see that there have at times been support that has often been given to people, this has usually come from the police. Service users have expressed at times that the police have been 'helpful' but everything seems to take so long. I believe that many service users who are in council/social housing accommodation are unaware of their rights and if the council/housing can provide additional advice/ support. I feel that perpetrators are not dealt with a heavy enough deterrent in the first instance leading to ongoing ASB or progressively more violent behaviour.

Having attended various meetings, I was surprised at both the lack of rehabilitation and resources available for those behaving in an "anti-social" manner and the amount of victim blaming that occurs within these meetings. I don't believe the root cause is being addressed and I feel victims' needs are being neglected. Having said that, I have worked with some committed ASB workers who are doing everything they can to tackle the problems.

I think that in the main SWP and the LA are doing their best to combat ASB reports in the City. Our service-users regularly report that these agencies are doing 'nothing' to resolve their issues but looking at the facts it would be very difficult for them to make arrests or bring other resolutions when there is very little or no

evidence. I do feel that they do not treat the victims of ASB in an efficient way in terms of often not keeping them updated on cases, or being far too slow to respond to complaints.

The majority of my cases in Swansea involve housing associations so I don't have much experience of working with Swansea Council's ASB team so I don't know how well I can answer this question. I would say that I do think it is very useful that Swansea Council has Local Area Coordinators as I can signpost victims who have become isolated as a result of ASB and the Coordinators have a good local knowledge to help our clients recover.

Do you think that the council and its partners work together effectively to both prevent and tackle ASB?

From my current experience I can see that there are steps in place to help prevent/tackle ASB but I do believe there could be greater help for people who are victims of ASB. I believe that more support groups maybe beneficial and more information to help guide people who have been victims of ASB. I believe that working together is crucial to preventing ASB and can be a great way of sharing knowledge through organisations.

I have worked with various council staff and partners over the years and I feel they are doing everything possible in an attempt to tackle the issue. However, they are under-resourced and not able to make enough of an impact. In my experience, the council and partners have a better attitude towards ASB.

However, feedback from service users is that messages are often conflicting between partners, i.e. stating that the ASB is a police matter/ police stating it's a local authority matter. This at times becomes frustrating for the service users who then stops reporting.

My experience of PSG meetings is that the LA and its partners have strong appetite to reduce instances of ASB but may be hindered by a lack of resources to actually put plans into action.

I know in other areas of South Wales the police and local authority regularly attend Problem Solving Group meetings, I find these are useful to tack ASB and ensure that victims are receiving the appropriate support. (I'm not sure if these meetings are in Swansea already but if not they would be helpful I believe).

How would you like to see Swansea Council and its partners improve how it prevents and tackles ASB in Swansea?

I would like to see more support for victims as well as advice/drop in centres for people who are suffering with the effects of ASB .I would also like to see more training groups/courses available to help with the awareness and understanding of ASB which could be run via the local community. I believe that educating people at a younger age may also be of benefit (courses in schools). I believe that the council have a duty to impose stricter rules for tenants who are ASB perpetrators.

I think there needs to be a review of all services supporting ASB across South Wales. For an issue that is so prevalent, there is a definite lack of support available. From a SWVF perspective, we are one of few agencies that offer support to victims of ASB.

It would be good to see a more proactive approach to ASB rather than reactive and to give a consistent message to those reporting and being impacted by ASB. Feedback from service users has also highlighted that more CCTV maybe required around the outskirts of the city centre. Some service users have advised they have reported incidents whereby they thought there was a camera but have been told that the CCTV camera is no actually in use.

An improved communication process with victims: One of the big issues reported to us by victims is that they have not been contacted to discuss the issues or that there is no ongoing dialogue.

I (Hate Crime Team) haven't received any referral's from Swansea Council so I would like this to be addressed so that more victims are able to access our service. I think to be able to prevent and tackle ASB in Swansea we all need to improve our partnership working within the area.

If the behaviour doesn't meet the criminal threshold in individual incidents, such as staring to intimidate, taking images of a person's daily life, comments or behaviour that are made to provoke a reaction, relentless commenting, noise making or tampering with property without damage, using animal faeces in letterboxes, on door steps etc. or purposely blocking in cars to create an opportunity for interaction in which to use to be abusive. For these incidents it would be good if there could be more severe first warnings or injunction style reprimands issued to the perpetrator by the council. In my experience the victims of ASB just want to be left alone and to be able to use their gardens freely. I also think that the council should use the tenancy agreement more often to remind people that they may be compromising their accommodation if they continue to attack neighbours.

Cardiff Local Authority fund a specific ASB Champion that works alongside Victim Support and Cardiff Council ASB team to provide tailored support to victims of ASB for Cardiff Council housing tenants. If this could be mirrored in other Local Authorities then it would help with the efforts to support victims of ASB across South Wales.

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