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Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary
The Home Office
Sent by email

Dear Home Secretary

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR - A CALL FOR ACTION

We are writing to you to ask that you take immediate action to deal with a surge of anti-social behaviour triggered by the Covid-19 lockdown.

Anti-social behaviour devastates the lives of victims and communities. It is not low-level and is often a precursor to more serious crime – such as knife crime and gang violence.

The effects of ongoing, persistent, distressing anti-social behaviour cannot be overstated.

Research from a YouGov poll from March this year showed that even before lockdown, 61% of people felt that more needed to be done to tackle anti-social behaviour in their local area, with 39% of people saying the problem had increased in their area over the past three years.

The feedback from victims is that all too often, they feel they are being constantly targeted by perpetrators; and yet persistently ignored by those with the power to prevent and intervene.

Police forces and councils are struggling to cope with the volume of complaints and this means victims are suffering as they are not receiving the support they deserve.

There has been a huge spike in cases of anti-social behaviour since lockdown.

The plight of so many victims could so easily have been avoided had the short-comings in the handling anti-social behaviour been tackled previously.

On 29 April 2019 - over a year ago - Baroness Newlove, published the report "Living a Nightmare" in her last act before stepping down as Victims' Commissioner.

The report highlighted systemic failures in handling anti-social behaviour and called on the Government to reform the way that cases are dealt with so that victims are given a voice and can challenge authorities who fail to act.

Without these urgent reforms, victims continue to suffer in silence and there is no authority responsible for providing redress or respite.

Sixteen months later, we are disappointed to see that, with one exception, none of her recommendations have been acted upon. This is despite the strenuous efforts from the current Victims' Commissioner, Dame Vera Baird.

Victims still do not have a voice and in many parts of the country, the Community Trigger process – which is supposed to allow the public to challenge how their complaints of anti-social behaviour have been dealt with – is simply not fit for purpose.

We are calling on the Government to provide leadership and use this situation as an opportunity to put in place measures to combat anti-social behaviour effectively, not just in response to Covid-19, but for the future.

We want you to send a clear message to the public that anti-social behaviour will no longer be ignored.

As a first step, we want to see existing Community Safety Partnerships encouraged to set up special "Nightingale taskforces" to quantify and tackle the backlog of anti-social behaviour complaints.

This will only happen if Government is prepared to offer the resources and provide guidance on a standardised way of working for the future.

These taskforces must incorporate practitioners and legal teams who have knowledge and expertise to use the array of existing statutory measures already available to keep people safe. Taskforces must include representatives from mental health services and should be held accountable to victims where no meaningful resolution to the anti-social behaviour is provided.

At the same time, we are calling on the Home Office to immediately and fully implement the key recommendations in "Living a Nightmare", including:

- Recognition of the impact of persistent ASB on victims, by affording them the same rights to support as all other crime victims, when they reach the 'three complaints' threshold needed to activate the Community Trigger.

- Involving victims by giving them the right to attend resolution meetings to explain in person the impact the behaviour is having on them.
- Making resolution meetings a real opportunity to challenge officials by having them chaired by an independent person.
- Making a legal requirement for Local Authorities, Police and Crime Commissioners, Police and housing associations to display accurate guidelines on the Community Trigger prominently on their websites and notice boards and publications.
- Considering replicating legal powers available to police in Scotland who can serve warnings, fines and seize noisy equipment.

For too long, authorities have underestimated the impact of anti-social behaviour on its victims. And all too often they have failed to tackle it effectively.

The Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 was meant to empower victims and ensure swift and effective action. This has not materialised.

The advent of COVID-19 has brought this into sharp focus, with lockdown and social distancing giving perpetrators of anti-social behaviour easy targets, particularly the vulnerable.

This is an opportunity to send a clear signal to those who bring so much distress to their neighbourhoods that their behaviour will no longer be tolerated.

It is an opportunity to make sure the victim's voice will always be heard and that local agencies who fail to respond are held to account.

It is time to act. We, the signatories of this letter are requesting the opportunity to meet with you and share our concerns and to hear how you plan to proceed.

Yours sincerely



Dame Vera Baird QC
Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales

Baroness Newlove

Baroness Newlove

Victims' Commissioner 2013-19

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