

Altering lighting in an alleyway to reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB)

Reducing street lighting to reduce anti-social behaviour in a residential area.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Anti-social behaviour
Organisation	Staffordshire Police
Contact	Claire Fernyhough
Email address	claire.fernyhough@staffordshire.police.uk
Region	West Midlands
Partners	Police Local authority
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	May 2022
Completion date	January 2023

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Offenders Victims

Aim

To reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the alleyway and enable victims of ASB to feel safe, without having to experience any harassment or distress.

Intended outcome

To reduce reports of ASB in the area.

Description

An elderly couple reported ASB in an alleyway adjacent to their property. The ASB involved people congregating at night, being noisy, taking drugs and discarding bottles. Reports of ASB in this alleyway continued from this first call in 2020 to the end of 2022.

In March 2021, the group responsible for the persistent ASB committed a violent crime. They badly assaulted the male of the elderly couple who had come out of his home at night to confront the group due to their persistent ASB. Following the assault, the local policing team increased patrols in the area and local Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) increased their visibility and engagement with the victim. While this provided reassurance to the victim, the ASB continued and, due to demand, patrols were relocated.

From November 2020 to the end of December 2022 there were twelve reports of ASB in the alleyway to police and a serious assault by the perpetrators on the victim when he went out to confront them.

All reports were by the same victim and related to ASB including drug and alcohol misuse at the location, excessive noise from loud music, shouting and swearing, climbing on the fences, and

littering including discarded and smashed bottles thrown around. During one call the victim said this was happening 2 or 3 times a week but that they did not always report it because of the waiting times on 101. They were also reporting to the Council and their local MP. The total number of reports of ASB to the council is unknown.

The local PCSO first contacted the ASB Problem Solver on 17/03/2022 to request assistance at the location. A joint site visit was arranged with the Senior Enforcement Officer of East Staffordshire Borough Council to evaluate any factors that may be contributing to the ASB and make recommendations to try and resolve the issues. The visit was delayed due to the Coronavirus pandemic but finally took place on 06/05/2022.

Recommendations

The problem solver's primary recommendation to deter ASB at the location was in regard to lighting. The introduction of lighting at a location which is in darkness during night-time hours is usually considered to enable better natural surveillance, ensuring that any criminal activity is more visible to passers-by and thereby deterring such activity.

However, in this instance after surveying the alleyway it was recommended that one of the lighting columns on the alleyway be extinguished with the other two columns remaining lit. The rationale was that the identified lighting column was at a point on the alleyway which had no natural surveillance capability due to the winding nature of the alleyway.

While the lighting column in question was near the victim's bungalow, it was not overlooked by any windows or any other properties and the alleyway was enclosed by high fencing on both sides. The column could not be seen from either end of the alleyway so was in a blind spot and the light emanating from the column was thought to be enabling the perpetrators to congregate and conduct themselves as they wanted without being seen. The other two lighting columns were at each end of the alleyway and lit the two access points enabling natural surveillance at those points.

The request to extinguish just one of the lighting columns along the alleyway while leaving the remaining two lit, was questioned by the council because the advice was not in accordance with Home Office recommended guidance. Eventually, eight months after the recommendations were made following negotiation with the council and their consultation with the community, the lighting column was extinguished on 11/01/2023 for an initial 6-month trial period followed by regular two monthly reviews.

Overall impact

Since the lighting column was extinguished in January 2023 there have been no reports of ASB or any other crimes at this location. The local PCSO has visited the victim who have confirmed that the issues have stopped.

The council have only received one report from a member of the public that the light is out, and the victim was satisfied with the response that it had been switched off at the request of police.

It has been agreed with the council that the lighting column will remain extinguished.

This had a 100% reduction in reports of ASB at the location which has had a positive impact on the victims' lives.

Learning

It is important to efficiently share information between partners to identify ASB before it escalates into more serious criminality, such as in this case where ASB escalated into violent assault.

It is also important to offer different solutions and think 'outside of the box', for example, by taking out a lighting post, rather than increasing lighting in the area. It should also be noted that when implementing something that seems outside of guidelines, community and council inputs should be considered.

Best available evidence

The [Crime Reduction Toolkit](#) includes best-available evidence on using [street lighting](#) to reduce crime. However, this example shows that it can be used to reduce ASB in this situation.

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Tags

Crime reduction