

Securing space and restoring community – reducing anti-social behaviour (ASB) in open spaces

A partnership approach to tackle an anti-social behaviour (ASB), rough sleeping, and drug use hotspot in a public open space adjacent to a retirement housing association.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Anti-social behaviour Neighbourhood crime Drugs and alcohol offences
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Region	Eastern
Partners	Police Community safety partnership Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation

Key details

Stage of Implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	May 2025
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Communities General public Offenders Victims

Aim

The aim of the initiative is to:

- protect vulnerable residents living in retirement housing
- prevent unauthorised access to retirement housing
- restore community confidence and create a safer environment
- demonstrate the effectiveness of a partnership approach between police, housing, and local partners
- create a sustainable model for tackling ASB hotspots through environmental improvements, partnership coordination, and early intervention

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the initiative are to:

- reduce the number of reported ASB incidents and complaints within six months
- reduce the number of rough sleepers and drug-related activity within the targeted open space
- increase residents' confidence and feelings of safety
- decrease the repeat demand on police, housing, and local authority services
- reduce the number of reports of criminal and environmental damage and littering reports

Description

The securing space and restoring community initiative was developed in response to a persistent ASB hotspot in the public open space adjacent to Clarion Housing retirement living in Wisbech. The area had become associated with rough sleeping, drug use, intimidation, and criminal damage, leaving residents fearful and isolated. Despite Cambridgeshire Constabulary conducting repeated patrol and enforcement action, the area continued to be an ASB hotspot. It became clear that a police response alone was not sufficient in tackling this issue.

Planning process

Cambridgeshire Constabulary's Wisbech Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT) and Clarion Housing jointly reviewed incident data, resident reports, and environmental risks. The intelligence identified three main factors contributing to the ASB hotspot:

- people – persistent rough sleepers and substance misuse
- activity – drug use and intimidation
- place – poor lighting and layout

An action plan was developed to address all three aspects, combining enforcement, environmental improvements, and housing interventions. Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) objectives were set, with the aim to see a 75% reduction in ASB incidents within six months.

The overarching objective is to conduct structured reviews during the first three and six month and year.

Roles and teams

The securing space and restoring community partnership includes:

- Cambridgeshire Constabulary's Wisbech NPT – responsible for enforcement activity
- Clarion Housing – provide housing intelligence, managing tenancy issues and support residents
- Fenland District Council Community Safety and Housing Teams – support the closure process, provide CCTV coverage and facilitate rough sleeping interventions

- Change Grow Live Drug and Alcohol Services, Ferry Project and Salvation Army – provide support to individuals affected by homelessness and addiction

Implementation

The securing space and restoring community initiative has been implemented using a layered approach:

- Enforcement – a closure order has been obtained for the open space to restrict unauthorised access to the retirement housing. Graduated enforcement has been applied, starting with community protection notices, escalating to arrests and injunctions for persistent offenders.
- Environment - Clarion Housing have improved lighting, installed CCTV and fencing, demolished derelict garages and created new gardens to increase natural surveillance. A parking permit scheme and monitored CCTV camera have also introduced to deter misuse.
- Housing and community – a local lettings policy has been provided to residents and management transfers have been offered to individuals most affected. Cambridgeshire Constabulary have provided “coffee with a cop” sessions to provide reassurance to residents.
- Partnership co-ordination – all partners have a monthly meeting to maintain accountability and communication between services.

Funding and resources

Environmental improvements and CCTV installation have been funded by the Clarion Housing’s estate investment budget. £2,800 + VAT was spent on fencing and £3,800 + VAT was allocated for a gate. Fenland District Council have provided resources for CCTV monitoring. Cambridgeshire Constabulary’s enforcement activity has been delivered within existing operational resources and there has been no separate grant funding.

Senior management approval

Clarion Housing senior leadership and Cambridgeshire Constabulary command team have approved the partnership approach and supported the application of the closure order. Regular updates are provided to the Fenland Community Safety Partnership to ensure transparency and strategic oversight.

Overall impact

The intervention has had a significant and sustained impact on the area, achieving and exceeding its original aims. Within the first three months, police data recorded an 80% reduction in reported ASB incidents, surpassing the target of 75%. There have been no further reports of unauthorised access to the retirement housing. Complaints from residents have stopped following the environmental improvements.

The visible transformation of the open space, supported by the improved lighting, CCTV, and fencing have restored a sense of safety and pride in the community. Residents have reported feeling safer and more confident in their homes. Most residents have expressed their appreciation for the police and housing teams' visibility and persistence. Clarion Housing staff have also reported a marked improvement in tenancy sustainment and fewer requests for management transfers from the area.

The force and partners have seen improvements to information sharing, stronger cross-partner trust and a clearer understanding of each other's roles. The approach has demonstrated that enforcement, when combined with housing-led prevention and support, can lead to a reduction on repeat demand to services.

The model has since been rolled out to other locations in Wisbech, using the same multi-layered framework of enforcement, environmental design, and partnership coordination without the addition of the closure order. The initiative has been shared at regional and national forums, including a Housing Quality Network event, to demonstrate effective police–housing collaboration in tackling ASB and vulnerability.

Learning

What went well

- It is essential to have strong partnership working and shared ownership. By combining police powers with housing knowledge and local authority support, this has created a balanced approach of enforcement, environmental improvement, and support. Regular communication with all partners has provided consistency and built community trust.

Challenges

- It has been difficult to engage with rough sleepers and individuals with complex needs. This has been further complicated by information-sharing barriers, particularly around mental health and limited early intervention.
- There has also been some public confusion and negative media coverage on the closure order. This has been resolved through additional communication sent to the public and media outlets.

Weaknesses

- There is limited staff capacity which could affect the long-term visibility once the initial implementation phase has ended.
- The data sharing process between agencies could be improved to enable earlier identification and support for individuals from the mental health team.

Recommendations

- It is important to jointly agree on the problems and objectives from the start to ensure a consistent approach to tackling ASB hotspots.
- It is essential to regularly review the initiative and adapt to change when needed.

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