

Case Study 1 – Victim and Witness Support

This case involves a middle-aged female, who has continually threatened and intimidated local residents verbally in the North of the City. She appears to have little consideration for her neighbours and regularly hold parties in her back garden. These parties are attended by large numbers of youths who then contributed towards the excessive noise levels and threats.

Over a period of time this has had a detrimental impact on the local community and caused severe distress to numerous victims, young and old.

The underlying causes of the ASB have been the consumption of excessive amounts of alcohol and poor parenting of her two children.

Various positive steps were taken to deal with the unacceptable conduct of the perpetrator and her off-spring, which invariably involved the local Police. A considerable amount of effort was made by Social Care in trying to address the underlying causes of the ASB by this family. However, these interventions did not change the behaviour as was hoped.

Various other agencies have been involved in this case over the years, including the NHS, the Family Intervention Project and the Community Watch Patrol. The local Councillor also became involved, in an attempt to remedy the situation.

Unfortunately, none of the above interventions changed the family's behaviour and so the Neighbourhood Safety Team took over this case and prepared the case for enforcement action.

The main challenge however in taking enforcement action in this case was the fact that witnesses would not make a stand against this family due to fear of reprisals.

Numerous victims and witnesses were quite happy to talk to Derby Homes' staff but felt far too afraid and intimidated to attend Court or provide witness statements. They were petrified of repercussions from this tenant and her two teenage children having experienced previous occurrences of intimidation and threats.

Once the Victim and Witness Support Officer became involved, he immediately contacted all known victims and witnesses and uncovered several others.

The purpose of referring this case to the Support Officer was to initiate contact with known witnesses and to provide support and reassurance. The aim was to encourage the victims and witnesses to make a stand against this ASB by supporting them to provide witness statements telling the Court what they had experienced and hopefully to attend Court to give first hand evidence.

It was explained to all 12 witnesses in this case that the Judge prefers to see the people who have been experiencing the ASB when reading their statements so that he can ask them how the ASB has affected them. It was apparent that most of the

victims and witnesses were too frightened to attend Court and so refused to help. In order to reverse this, the Support Officer visited each witness, explained to them exactly what Derby Homes was intending to do, how long it would take, the support that he could make available to them. The Support Officer outlined the emotional and practical support that he could provide to them to lessen the fear of reprisals. He then asked if he could visit them on a regular basis in order to chat with them and update them on the progress of our case progression.

As a result of these visits, all 12 witnesses have now agreed to make a stand against this problematic family. Eight have agreed to give witness statements and attend Court, 4 have agreed to give witness statements but not attend Court.

In addition to the above support, each victim and witness has been offered the opportunity to attend Court prior to any official hearing, so that they can familiarise themselves with judicial surroundings. The Support Officer will accompany each and every one of the witnesses on this pre court visit and arrange transport to and from Court on all visits and hearings.

When the Support Officer was asked how he had managed to secure the victims and witnesses agreement in making a stand he said "Fortunately I was able to convince these poor people that I would do everything possible to prevent this happening after any Court case and that we needed their invaluable assistance in order to succeed."

This case is now at the final stages of case preparation with Legal Services. Derby Homes has prepared this case for Outright Possession and an Anti Social Behaviour Injunction to exclude this family from the estate that they currently reside.

The Victim and Witness Support Officer will continue to work very closely with all the victims and witnesses right through to the day of the hearing and any other subsequent hearings and post hearing. This support will only stop once the perpetrating family have left the area permanently, and each witness feels secure again.