Main Findings

- The antisocial behaviour strategies utilised a holistic multi-agency partnership approach based on the PIER pillars of prevention, intervention, enforcement and rehabilitation.

- There was a rise in the numbers of officially recorded incidents of antisocial behaviour in the last 3 years across the selected local authorities and in the majority of neighbourhoods studied. This rise may partly explained by an increasing propensity amongst residents to report incidents. It may also mask some reductions in more serious forms of antisocial behaviour.

- There was an improvement in agency performance in tackling antisocial behaviour, including enhanced partnership working, the implementation of a more holistic range of interventions, and increasingly effective operational planning, targeting and resource deployment.

- An economic evaluation of 12 antisocial behaviour initiatives found that community wardens and a Family Support project were demonstrably cost effective. Whilst other initiatives, including mediation services, had delivered improvements, it was not possible to fully determine their cost effectiveness.

- Significant proportions of residents in the case study neighbourhoods continued to perceive antisocial behaviour to be common and had personally experienced antisocial behaviour. Only a minority of residents perceived that the performance of local agencies had improved in the previous 12 months. Community wardens, concierges, additional police officers and initiatives to tackle under-age street drinking were viewed most positively by local residents.

- There was a problem across all the neighbourhoods with the under-reporting of incidents. There was also a general dissatisfaction with the initial frontline response to complaints about antisocial behaviour, although specialist witness support teams were more positively regarded.

- Securing funding to maintain present levels of services and to sustain the momentum of the antisocial behaviour strategies was a key priority in all four local authorities.
Introduction

The Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004 requires local authorities and Police Chief Constables to prepare and deliver an antisocial behaviour strategy for their area. The aims of this research were to:

- Evaluate how antisocial behaviour strategies were being implemented at local authority and neighbourhood level.
- Assess whether there was a reduction in incidents of antisocial behaviour, and whether the public perceived a reduction in levels of antisocial behaviour.
- Assess whether there was an improvement in the performance of local agencies in tackling antisocial behaviour and whether the public perceived an improvement in agency performance.
- Identify examples of good practice.

Antisocial Behaviour and Neighbourhood Interventions

Each of the 4 local authorities’ antisocial behaviour strategies had identified particular neighbourhoods experiencing high levels of antisocial behaviour and had targeted interventions at these neighbourhoods. The strategies were delivered through devolved multi-agency neighbourhood structures and processes, in combination with services provided centrally by the local authority. This resulted in considerable variation in the approaches being taken in individual neighbourhoods to tackle antisocial behaviour within and between the four case study local authorities. Although the strategies provided an overall framework and resources, the links between the strategies and interventions at the individual neighbourhood level were not always clear.

Reducing Incidents of Antisocial Behaviour

Levels of antisocial behaviour and recorded crime in the four local authorities were analysed, including fire raising, vandalism and police command and control data. The analysis found that there had been a rise in the number of antisocial behaviour incidents across the 4 local authorities and 7 of the 8 case study neighbourhoods in the last 3 years, which was consistent with national trends. This increase contrasted with the general perceptions of local agency officers that antisocial behaviour had stabilised or reduced in these neighbourhoods. This rise may partly be explained by increasing levels of reporting amongst residents, and may mask a reduction in some forms of more serious antisocial behaviour.

Improvements in Agency Performance

The research found evidence of improved agency performance in tackling antisocial behaviour at the neighbourhood level. This included enhanced partnership working amongst a greater range of agencies, leading to more effective operational planning, deployment, and targeting, the increasing use of holistic PIER-based interventions with individuals, households and communities, and growing effectiveness in utilising the full range of available antisocial behaviour measures. The most significant improvements were evident in neighbourhoods which have received significant resources allied to robust local partnership working. There was still scope for fully engaging all potential partners in the strategies at the neighbourhood level, providing clearer information to residents and in responding to the needs of victims and witnesses.

Economic Evaluation

An economic evaluation was conducted of 12 antisocial behaviour initiatives. These included the community wardens and mediation services in all four selected local authorities and also a Family Support project, a Safer Neighbourhoods Team, a night noise service and a freephone antisocial behaviour hotline. The economic evaluation faced considerable methodological challenges. The evaluation found that the community wardens services and the Family Support project were demonstrably cost effective. The other initiatives had delivered local improvements in tackling antisocial behaviour but it was not possible to determine their cost effectiveness. More robust and accurate financial information provided over a longer time period will be required if future economic evaluations of antisocial behaviour interventions are to be conducted.

Public Perceptions of Antisocial Behaviour and Agency Performance

The household survey found that significant proportions of residents continued to perceive antisocial behaviour to be common in their neighbourhood and that this was perception was largely based on direct recent personal experience as victims and witnesses. Residents’ perceptions of antisocial behaviour varied between the neighbourhoods. Only a
minority of residents believed that antisocial behaviour had reduced and that agency performance had improved in the previous 12 months.

Community wardens, concierges, additional police officers and initiatives to tackle under-age street drinking were the interventions that were most positively regarded by residents. There was a major problem of the non-reporting of antisocial behaviour incidents in all the case study neighbourhoods. Although the factors behind non-reporting are complex, dissatisfaction with agency responses, and confusion about which agencies incidents should be reported to, contributed to residents’ reluctance to make complaints.

Key Challenges
A number of key challenges remain in delivering antisocial behaviour strategies at the neighbourhood level. There is a need to ensure that all potential partners, including voluntary organisations and residents, are aware of and engaged with the strategies. There is also a need to facilitate greater ownership of the strategies and awareness of the range of interventions available amongst front line officers operating in local neighbourhoods. In particular, referral systems between neighbourhood officers and local authority-wide support services are often weak. The antisocial behaviour strategies also need to be more robustly linked to other neighbourhood level strategies, and there is evidence that this is occurring. Local authorities and their partners also face a considerable challenge in mainstreaming the services that are currently being delivered through Scottish Executive funding.

Conclusions
The nature and extent of the progress being made in tackling antisocial behaviour in Scottish neighbourhoods reflected the early stages of the implementation of local antisocial behaviour strategies. It may be anticipated that future progress will occur as the strategies bed in and new operational structures and partnership working processes begin to have a longer term impact. Antisocial behaviour in local neighbourhoods is caused by a wide range of factors and not all of these factors can be addressed through the antisocial behaviour strategies alone.

Although there was clear improvement in agency performance at the neighbourhood level, this improvement has not resulted in improved perceptions of antisocial behaviour and agency performance amongst local residents. This may be a function of the early stages of the strategies, but it would be problematic if in the longer term residents were not to become more positive about local agencies and did not identify reductions in antisocial behaviour in their neighbourhoods. Similarly, whilst increasing numbers of recorded incidents of antisocial behaviour may be interpreted at this stage as a sign of residents’ enhanced willingness to make complaints, it would be anticipated that the numbers of recorded incidents would begin to fall as the strategies develop.

This evaluation has found that many of the improvements in tackling antisocial behaviour within neighbourhoods have been facilitated by enhanced levels of service delivery and new initiatives. Finding the resources to continue these services is a vital component of sustaining the evident momentum towards tackling antisocial behaviour that is emerging.

About the Study
The research was carried out between March 2006 and March 2007 in 8 neighbourhoods in the City of Edinburgh, Fife, North Lanarkshire and the Scottish Borders. The research included secondary analysis of police and local authority data, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, a household survey of 200 residents in each neighbourhood, focus groups with adult residents and young people and semi-structured interviews with 46 victims and witnesses of antisocial behaviour.
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The report, “The Impact of Local Antisocial Behaviour Strategies at the Neighbourhood Level,” which is summarised in this research findings, is a web only document and is available on the publications pages of the Scottish Government website at http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/Recent

This document (and other Research Findings and Reports) and information about social research in the Scottish Government may be viewed on the Internet at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch

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