

West Lothian councillors agree to tighten rules around reporting anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour laws need to be reviewed to help councils deal with neighbours behaving badly, it has been claimed.

West Lothian councillors have agreed to tighten rules around reporting anti-social behaviour and a review how the existing legislation works.

The agreement comes after Conservative councillor Angela Doran-Timson raised a motion at full council calling for more support for people whose lives are made misery by neighbours.

And Independent councillor Andrew McGuire suggested that it was time for a wider, national redraw of the 20-year-old laws to give councils more powers to deal with problem neighbours.

The council's Safer Neighbourhood Team works with tenants to solve disputes between neighbours but it is bound by the legislation which defines what can be classed as anti-social behaviour.

Tenants often complain that the rules are ineffective in stopping neighbours behaving badly and that those who complain are not supported.

Seconding the motion Councillor Damian Doran-Timson said: "I'm

sure every councillor in this chamber has had to deal with the issue of anti-social behaviour. I feel for the housing team and the Safer Neighbourhood Team are restricted in what they can do.

“That’s not to say we can’t look forward and do better. I am sure we can make improvements. It’s awful when a neighbour’s life is impacted so badly by those who just don’t care what their actions are.

“It’s time we started getting behind the victims and helping those people and making sure the people carrying out anti-social behaviour face the consequences of their actions.”

The council has published information about dealing with neighbour disputes on its website, and the steps tenants can take.

There was broad support for the Tory motion but a composite amendment from the Labour and SNP groups highlighted that much of what was called for was already in place including on going reviews of cases.

The composite from Labour ‘s Craig Meek and the SNP’s Maria MacAulay’s amendments agreed: “A review of the support provided by the Council to victims of anti-social behaviour; review the customer satisfaction survey to ensure that it captures the feedback on how the Council dealt with concerns raised and a progress report to be brought to the Public and Community Safety PDSP.”

The Conservatives had called for the 3-month rule, whereby an antisocial behaviour warning is removed from someone’s record, be extended to 6 months.

Councillor McGuire told the meeting the issue was frustrating for residents and professionals.

He added: “The legislation was passed in 2004 perhaps needs

modernising. Local authorities need more powers to investigate anti-social behaviour.

“Also, there’s a very fine line between what’s classed as anti-social behaviour, and what’s criminality, and the responsibility of Police Scotland – drug consumption and drug dealing are perfect examples of that.

“Though I’m going to support the composite amendment, I do congratulate councillor Doran-Timson for bringing this forward because I think it’s hugely important issue.

I am glad we are taking proactive steps to modernise the service. It can only be a good thing. I think the central point here is that we do need to look at the legislation around anti-social behaviour to make sure the legislation is fit for purpose and gives people what they need.”

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter