

# **West Lothian Council to do more to help victims of anti-social behaviour**

**More should be done to help victims of anti-social behaviour in West Lothian, the council has acknowledged.**

An ongoing review of practice followed a motion at a recent meeting of the full council which called for improvements.

It will mean extra training for council staff and more feedback sought from victims.

Safer Neighbourhood Teams will do more to follow up complaints.

A meeting of the Public and Community Safety Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel heard a report from Alison Smith, Housing Operations & Community Safety Manager.

Ms Smith told the meeting: "The review has identified key areas of improvement activity that seeks to enhance the customer experience when accessing the Council's Safer Neighbourhood Team service and continue to support and explore opportunities to work with our partners in the Community Safety Partnership and wider Council Services."

Councillor Angela Doran-Timson proposed an initial motion calling on the council to do more to help householders who complained about bad neighbours and to provide more support for them.

She said: "The Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) is the council's operational unit who deals with reports of anti-social behaviour and is the public's first point of contact when they fall victim to noisy, abusive and threatening behaviour from neighbours. Unfortunately, from my experience, only some residents who report such behaviour are treated as victims."

The problems that all councils face lie in the very strict interpretation of existing legislation about what constitutes antisocial behaviour – which council officers can tackle – and what is criminal behaviour for the police to tackle.

Some councillors argue that root and branch reform of the existing legislation is needed to recognise societal changes

The report added: "In order to capture feedback from customers on the advice and assistance offered by the SNT and the links made with other supports and council services, it is proposed to introduce a further question, which will ask – 'How could we have improved our handling of your case to better meet your needs?'

"The feedback from the questionnaire will continue to be regularly monitored and analysed to identify any further improvement actions in relation to supporting those who report anti-social behaviour."

A composite motion eventually agreed by the council from Labour Councillor Craig Meek and the SNPs Maria MacAulay said: "The motion presented by Cllr Doran-Timson highlights and asks for many things that are currently in place and whilst the feeling is that legislation and guidance can be a hindrance it is important that the Council works within the current legislation in addressing matters like this to avoid any legal challenge"

It went on to call for a review of the support in place and the customer satisfaction protocols.

In her report to the PDSP Ms Smith said benchmarking was undertaken by reaching out to other local authorities, Scottish Housing Network Anti-Social Behaviour forum, Scottish Community Justice Organisation (SACRO) and Scottish Safer Communities Network.

Eleven local authorities responded, and with responses for the other agencies, it has led to plans for increased training and new connections as well as a commitment to strengthen links with existing partners.

The report added: "The SNT team manager has positively reached out to Victim Support to re-establish and strengthen connections which includes referral pathways and improving information for customers to access on the Council website and update partners of the services available. Officers have planned meetings with Victims Support in early December 2024 to progress this improvement activity."

It added: "The SNT training plan includes customer care, refresh on mediation and de-escalation techniques, Trauma Informed Practice training and mental health/suicide awareness. This training will continue to assist and equip officers in their case management and support for customers when accessing the service."

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter