

Una Padel reviews the Anti-Social Behaviour White Paper, drug testing and plans to extend the DNA database.

Respect

The *Anti-Social Behaviour Bill* was published at the end of March less than a fortnight after the White Paper '*Respect and Responsibility – Taking a Stand Against Anti-Social Behaviour*'. The White Paper says that anti-social behaviour blights lives and creates an environment where more serious crime can take hold. It suggests that experience of anti-social behaviour may explain the mismatch between people's perceptions that the crime rate has risen and the evidence that tells us that crime has fallen substantially in the last five years.

Proposals from the White Paper include:

- Intensive fostering for young people as an alternative to custody. This involves the provision of a range of professional support services to meet the young person's needs in a foster-care setting while working with the young person's family to enhance their parenting skills.
- Residential options for parents experiencing problems, possibly with an additional requirement attached to Parenting Orders to ensure compliance.
- Enabling Local Education Authorities to seek a free-standing Parenting Order where a child has been excluded for serious misbehaviour.
- Fixed Penalty Notices to be issued by police officers, school and LEA staff to parents who condone or ignore truancy.
- Extension of the intensive phase of the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP) from 6 months to 12 months.
- The introduction of Individual Support Orders (ISO) to require children and young people with Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) to accept help.
- Making the offence of begging recordable and introducing new powers for courts to impose a community penalty after three convictions for it.
- More robust powers for local authorities to deal with fly-tipping, graffiti and fly-posting.
- Improved protection for witnesses giving evidence in ASBO hearings.

Testing, testing...

Results from the drug testing in police custody pilots have now been published by the Home Office. At nine pilot sites people charged with a trigger offence, such as burglary or theft from and of vehicles, have been tested for drug use in the custody suite. Positive results varied from 66% in Hackney to 36% in Torquay. Similar testing schemes will soon be introduced in the 30 areas identified as being worst affected by drug-related crime,

and an extra £46.2 million was announced by the Home Secretary in January for rolling out a complete package which will target drug users at every stage of the criminal justice system. This comes not a moment too soon as the Criminal Justice Bill contains a provision for the presumption of bail to be reversed for defendants who test positive for class A drugs unless they agree to undergo treatment. At the moment waiting lists mean many would be unable to access treatment at short notice. *Evaluation of drug testing in the criminal justice system in nine pilot areas; Matrix MHA and Nacro Home Office Findings 180 March 2003*

Dabs and DNA

Controversial plans to increase the number of people whose fingerprints and DNA are stored on national databases are being put forward as amendments to the *Criminal Justice Bill* currently going through Parliament. At the moment samples can only be taken from suspects once they have been charged. Supporters of this proposal argue that it will help police officers to verify the identity of suspects whose fingerprints have been taken before, and allow DNA comparisons with profiles taken from other crime scenes. Opponents say that it is yet another intrusion into civil liberties. Fingerprints and samples taken from suspects who are arrested would be retained even where insufficient evidence exists to charge, let alone proceed to prosecution.

No half measures

Alcohol, crime and disorder: a study of young adults was published by the Home Office in March. It combines information from the 1998/9 Youth Lifestyles Survey with in-depth interviews with young adult binge drinkers. Analysis of the information from the Youth Lifestyles Survey showed that frequency of drunkenness was an important indicator of offending and disorderly behaviour, particularly of violent crime. 18-24 year olds who got very drunk at least once a week had five and a half times the likelihood of admitting to a violent offence than those who got drunk less than once a month.

The young adults interviewed suggested that to encourage more moderate drinking licensed premises should offer soft drinks at cheap prices, refuse to serve customers who were drunk and provide alcohol education in schools from an early age. To reduce crime and disorder they advocated targeted policing, harsher penalties for those convicted of alcohol-related crime, better training and vetting of door staff, longer opening hours, plastic bottles and glasses and better transport out of town and city centres.

An evaluation of a Cardiff-based project demonstrated that some of these measures can have a positive effect. Improving the quality and behaviour of door staff at licensed premises, better communication between police and licensees, and alcohol education in schools were factors that helped to reduce alcohol-related assaults in the Cardiff and Cardiff Bay area by 4%. Targeted policing cut incidents by 41% and 36% in and around two specific clubs. *Alcohol, crime and disorder: a study of young adults*.

Reducing alcohol-related violence and disorder: an evaluation of the Tackling Alcohol and Street Related Crime Project.

Both published by the Home Office and available on the Home Office website. ■