

BOROUGH / PROJECT :

Newham Council Khat - related nuisance



PROBLEM :

Residents of Forest Gate in East London complained to Newham council and police about the behaviour of groups of young men who were gathering in rowdy groups to chew khat. The complainants said they felt intimidated by the group loitering, using drugs and being rowdy. Residents were also concerned about the late night noise nuisance and the amount of litter they left behind.



SOLUTION :

Implementing a problem solving approach that involved joint working between Newham police and Newham council to identify group members and address the issue of local shops supplying khat.

BACKGROUND :

Following a spike in complaints to both Newham police and Newham council it became apparent in late 2010 that there was a significant degree of anti-social behaviour linked to groups of young Somali males gathering to chew khat in the Forest Gate area. Khat is a leafy plant that acts as a stimulant, similar to amphetamine; it is popular in parts of Africa and is currently legal in the UK, although banned in other countries including the USA.

ACTIONS :

Newham police and the council pooled resources and shared information to maximise opportunities to identify the group of males. Joint viewing of more than 30 hours of CCTV footage was undertaken, council ASB investigation officers worked up a comprehensive schedule of allegations against each identified offender, arrests and ASB incidents were cross-referenced. Over the course of a year a total of 40 offenders were identified. A Somali ASB officer, able to act as interpreter, accompanied police to visit the home of every identified offender. For many offenders a warning to their family homes was sufficient deterrent; others agreed to voluntarily abide by an acceptable behaviour contract.

A police test purchasing team identified the core group of men engaged in drug dealing and seven criminal convictions were secured.

Newham trading standard officers, accompanied by police and Revenue and Customs paid joint visits to the shops selling khat. One of the shops was shut down in relation to the premises raid arising from police response to the Class A activities. The remaining two shops are working with the police and trading standards to ensure they do not serve offenders who have been served with ASBOs.

OUTCOMES :

- Seven criminal convictions
- 12 group members banned from the area
- Other group members signed up to ABCs
- Improved engagement
- A 30 per cent reduction in complaints within six months, a 90 per cent reduction after 12 months.

FUNDING :

£166,000 funding provided by Newham council and housing partners to allow 'target hardening' measures at specific locations affected by the ASB, as well as new CCTV, new railings and improved lighting has been undertaken to ensure that the ground gained as a result of the joint action is not lost.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT :

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