

Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour

This Summary has been developed to help reduce anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhoods that we work in. If you wish to be sent a copy of the full Policy and Procedure, please contact the Customer Service Centre on 0800 195 5515.

General Policy Statement

The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 requires all social landlords to have a policy in place regarding anti-social behaviour. The procedure should include clear processes for dealing with all reported complaints of anti-social behaviour. These documents are reviewed regularly.

Sentinel is committed to working to improve the quality of life for all its residents. We want to:

- Maintain or improve the quality of life for tenants and the wider community;
- Contribute to community safety and crime reduction;
- Protect individuals from the effects of anti-social behaviour;
- Promote good neighbour relations and tolerance of lifestyle differences;
- Create communities where people want to live and can do so peacefully, enjoying their homes without the fear of crime or anti-social behaviour.

What is Anti-Social Behaviour?

Acting in a way that causes or could cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons who do not live together.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Hate behaviour that targets people perceived to be different including racial, religious and homophobic harassment;
- Criminal behaviour;
- Drugs, alcohol and solvent misuse;
- Intimidation;
- Harassment;
- Noise nuisance;
- Graffiti and damage to property;
- Fly tipping, litter and misuse of communal areas;
- Overgrown and neglected gardens;
- Nuisance from pets and animals;
- Motor vehicle nuisance and abandonment;
- Boundary disputes;
- Nuisance from businesses.

It is the policy of Sentinel Housing to deal with all complaints of anti-social behaviour in accordance with our published Procedure. Our aim is to thoroughly investigate all complaints of anti-social behaviour and take early and appropriate action to tackle these problems effectively.

Sentinel considers harassment to be unacceptable and is preparing a separate Policy and Procedure to deal with incidents of Hate Behaviour, this includes racial, religious or homophobic harassment. All staff receive Equality and Diversity training.

Sentinel also recognises the damage that domestic violence can cause to all those involved and is preparing a separate Policy and Procedure to deal with this important issue.

How does this affect you?

All our tenants have a Tenancy Agreement, which includes promises that tenants will not cause a nuisance to other people and that they will look after their home and neighbourhood. It sets minimum standards of behaviour for you and your neighbours. We also try to help when the neighbour causing the anti-social behaviour is not one of our tenants.

I am not a tenant of Sentinel, but my neighbour is. Can you help me?

Yes, we will help in all cases where our tenant is the cause of anti-social behaviour, or troubled by it. Any person or organisation can report a problem.

What should I do if a neighbour is causing a nuisance?

We generally advise that the first step is to talk face to face with your neighbour. They may not realise that you are upset by their actions and their behaviour may change when you talk about it. We suggest the following tips for discussing the matter directly with your neighbour:

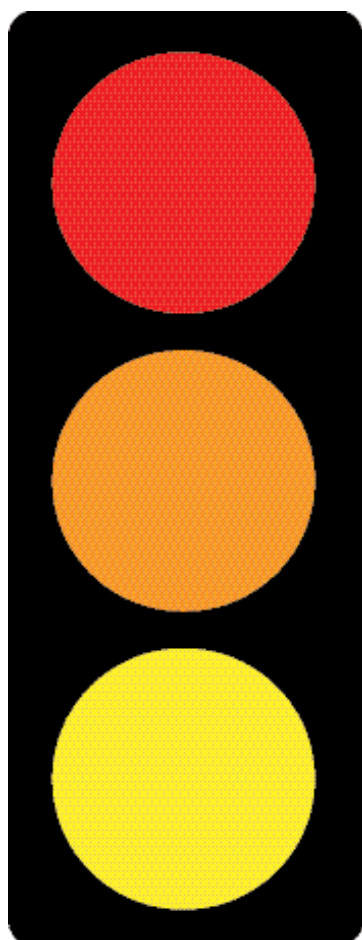
- Always discuss your concerns in a friendly manner.
- Ask your neighbour about their ideas for improving things?
- Listen to your neighbour's point of view and be prepared to reach a friendly compromise about what can be done to improve things.
- Never threaten your neighbour or behave aggressively as this may make matters worse.
- If you do find the meeting with your neighbour is becoming angry, end the discussion rather than letting the discussion end in an argument.

The chances are that you will continue to live next door to your neighbour for a long time, so try not to fall out. We do understand that there are some circumstances where you may feel intimidated, and in these cases we suggest that you discuss the matter with your Neighbourhood Co-ordinator first. This is particularly important if your complaint is about drug supply or dealing, serious harassment or threats of violence.

What will Sentinel do if talking with my neighbour has not worked. How can you help?

Please contact the Customer Services Centre on 0800 195 5515 if talking directly with your neighbour has not worked. The Customer Service Advisor will ask you a few questions regarding your complaint, which will help us to assess our priority for dealing with the matter.

The priority system we use is explained in more detail below:



PRIORITY RED

Allegations of drug dealing, assault, criminal activity, hate crime (racial, religious or homophobic harassment), offensive graffiti, serious harassment or intimidation and violence (or threats of violence).

Your Neighbourhood Co-ordinator will make contact within 24 hours.

PRIORITY AMBER

Allegations of aggressive or abusive behaviour, frequent noise nuisance, frequent vandalism or graffiti and verbal or written harassment.

Your Neighbourhood Co-ordinator will make contact within 3 working days.

PRIORITY YELLOW

Breaches of tenancy; car repairs or abandonment, noise nuisance, nuisance caused by pets and untidy gardens.

Your Neighbourhood Co-ordinator will make contact within 5 working days.

When the Neighbourhood Co-ordinator contacts you they will want to agree an action plan and agree how best the problems can be resolved.

You may be asked to complete diary log sheets and record details of the problems you are experiencing. If you do not collect this information, it may be difficult for us to help you.

We may discuss the allegations with your neighbour. We will never identify you to your neighbour.

We may suggest that your case should be referred to an independent mediation service, who are very successful at helping neighbours to reach agreements with each other.

We also talk to other agencies such as the Police or Council Departments such as Environmental Health. We can manage anti-social behaviour more effectively if we work as a team with other agencies. We may ask if we can exchange personal information with other agencies in accordance with data protection legislation. The law allows us to exchange personal information where this is likely to reduce Crime and Disorder.

We also try to prevent anti-social behaviour by, for example, funding and working with Community Wardens who can work on the ground with young people.

We will need to collect lots of information that will help us and other agencies to tackle the problem. This information will need to be recorded properly so that we can use the information in Court if we decide to take legal action.

Does that mean you will evict someone for anti-social behaviour?

Yes, we do evict the worst tenants, but it is much better to deal with the problem. A tenant who is evicted may well continue with their anti-social behaviour somewhere else and so we try to resolve problems by using other powers that we have available to us. We only take legal action and evict as a last resort.

So, how else do you make people behave properly?

We have a number of methods that are available to us. These include:

- Acceptable Behaviour Contract - a contract that is jointly signed by the perpetrator (including children), Sentinel, the Police and other agencies which sets out very clearly the standards of behaviour that we would expect.
- Environmental Health action - legal notices can be served, which require that noise is stopped or rubbish is cleared up. Courts can impose fines and even confiscate sound equipment if the notices are breached.
- Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and Injunctions - special Court Orders requiring people to do or not do something - these can be used to stop youths gathering or to keep someone from a particular estate, or even to stop someone working on nuisance cars. In some cases we will seek an interim ASBO or injunction to provide emergency protection for the community.
- Demotion Orders - orders imposed by the Courts which take away a tenant's 'security of tenure'. If the anti-social behaviour continues then we can deal with the problems more quickly.

We will always use actions that are reasonable and fair for the level of anti-social behaviour being complained about.

I am worried about complaining about my neighbour.

If you are concerned, please discuss your concerns with your Neighbourhood Co-ordinator. We can provide the following support to complainants:

- Meeting complainants within 24 hours if the case has been given a Red Priority.
- Updating the complainant on a regular basis whenever there is a significant development in the case.
- Assisting with home security, including the use of CommuniCare. We will fit door viewers and safety chains in appropriate cases.
- Referring complainants to other appropriate agencies, including victim support and floating support.
- Where there is a proven significant risk to the complainant's health or personal safety, we will move complainants temporarily or permanently.
- In the event of Court action where complainants are witnesses, we will escort the complainant between their home and the Court and return and offer general support through the process.

If you want to know more about how to deal with anti-social behaviour, contact your Neighbourhood Co-ordinator. This document is updated annually, so if you have a comment to make about how we manage Anti-Social Behaviour, please tell us, so we can consider it when we next review the Policies and Procedures.

The Hate crime and domestic violence policies and procedures are currently being reviewed and updated. Sentinel would welcome any comments that you may have about these issues. Please contact Tim Part, Neighbourhood Services Manager with your comments.

Once this policy is completed, we will send a new section for your Residents' Handbook covering all our new policies.