

Report on the Proceedings of an ESRC Research Seminar

The first seminar in an ESRC-sponsored series on **Governing Through Anti-social Behaviour** was held at Sheffield Hallam University on 15 November 2007. The seminar brought together 40 academics, policymakers and practitioners from across Britain to explore the theme of **Governing Anti-social Behaviour Through Housing**.

Adam Crawford from the University of Leeds and David Prior (University of Birmingham) provided an introduction and overview to the entire research seminar series, which will comprise five seminars and culminate in a final conference in 2009. Crawford and Prior emphasised the key aims of the seminar series, which include developing robust networks between academics, policy makers and practitioners, improving our comparative understanding of anti-social behaviour and policy responses in the UK and internationally, ensuring the wide dissemination of emerging research findings, and developing new themes and areas for research. John Flint (Sheffield Hallam University) provided an introduction to the seminar, emphasising the central role for housing in the causation, manifestation and governance of anti-social behaviour.

Alison Brown from the University of Stirling presented the first paper, examining the links between **housing, social control and the governance of anti-social behaviour**. Peter Squires (University of Brighton) acted as a discussant. Brown drew upon the work of Stanley Cohen to argue that policy and practice developments have resulted in a broadening in the range of behaviours governance mechanisms attempt to regulate and an increasing range of actors, including housing organisations, becoming engaged in the regulation of conduct. Brown identified key characteristics of contemporary governance including the blurring of the criminal and the civil and the public and private and a process whereby the outcomes of new mechanisms of social control in turn result in further mechanisms and powers being introduced.

The second and third seminar presentations focused on the governance of anti-social behaviour in different housing tenures. Dave Cowan (University of Bristol) and Caroline Hunter (University of Manchester) presented a paper entitled '**Governing the ungovernable: private sector landlords and anti-social behaviour**.' The responses to the paper were led by Sarah Blandy (University of Leeds). Cowan and Hunter highlighted government attempts

to increase the regulation of the private rented sector and to incorporate private landlords more formally into the governance of anti-social behaviour. The paper described how the characteristics of the sector made this difficult, and explored through a case study of private landlord associations the resistance of the sector to increasing responsibility for managing the conduct of tenants. Cowan and Hunter concluded however that the emergence of private landlord associations provided new mechanisms for governing the tenure.

Peter Jackson, from the Social Landlords Crime and Nuisance Group described the **role of social landlords in tackling anti-social behaviour** and how this was being influenced by the continual evolution of the Respect agenda, including new inspection regimes and the Respect Housing Management Standard. He highlighted concerns about ASBOs and registered social landlords' status within anti-social behaviour governance partnerships. Jackson concluded that social landlords could and should play a key role in addressing anti-social behaviour, including involvement in parenting and education interventions, as part of their wider investment in local communities. However such a role would have implications for registered social landlord's operational capacity. The discussion of the presentation was led by Stephen Moore (Anglia Ruskin University).

The final session of the seminar began with a presentation by Hal Pawson (Heriot Watt University) on **the Use of ASBOs in Scotland**, based on a recent study for the Scottish Government. Neil Wain from Greater Manchester Police acting as discussant. Pawson showed the trends in the use of ASBOs and how these varied between areas. He demonstrated how ASBOs remain largely a social housing management tool. Pawson explored the considerable contrasts between the use of ASBOs in Scotland and England and Wales, for example the fact that far fewer ASBOs in Scotland were issued against young people. Pawson concluded by suggesting that the evidence on the effectiveness of ASBOs in Scotland was somewhat ambiguous.

Adam Crawford (University of Leeds) gave a presentation entitled '**The Use and Impact of Dispersal Orders: The communicative properties of governing anti-social behaviour**', which Elizabeth Burney (University of Cambridge) led the responses to. Crawford's presentation was based on recent research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Crawford described the different contexts within which Dispersal Orders have been used and explored the implementation challenges and the impacts of the Orders on incidences and perceptions

of anti-social behaviour and the relationship between the police and young people. Crawford explained how Dispersal Orders provided an example of a two-step prohibition process involving personalised penal codes and criminal sanctions being linked to failure to comply with an order about future conduct. He concluded that the authorisation process involved in Dispersal Orders could act as a catalyst for multi-agency interventions and problem-solving, but noted that this should not be dependent upon the application for a Dispersal Order.

The seminar concluded with a general discussion session exploring the key themes to emerge from the presentations and responses to them. These key themes included:

- The criminalisation of social policy.
- The centrality of housing to the governance of anti-social behaviour.
- The constant legislative expansion of legal powers, including the extension and widening of initial mechanisms such as ASBOs and the ratcheting up of penal sanctions.
- The widening and thinning of the governance 'net' regulating conduct and the further incorporation of agencies and organisations, including housing providers, into governance mechanisms.
- The historical precedents for formal and informal social control that have been repackaged in the contemporary conceptualisation of 'anti-social behaviour.'
- Fundamental shifts in the governance of behaviour, including the growing use of contract and conditionality, the emphasis on future conduct and the discretionary powers of police officers, housing officers and other practitioners.
- The controversial role of 'the community' and new actors in the governance of anti-social behaviours and associated issues of democracy, accountability, audit, responsibility and exclusion.
- The variation and dynamism in the governance of anti-social behaviour at the local level.
- The problematisation of young people in public space and the need to challenge the emphasis upon young people within the anti-social behaviour policy agenda despite the fact that most anti-social behaviour involves adults.
- The need to balance enforcement mechanisms with prevention and support interventions, recognising that many perpetrators are also victims and that anti-social behaviour complainants may also be problematic.

- The need to explore the structural causes of anti-social behaviour.
- The very different application of enforcement technologies, including ASBOs and Dispersal Orders, between Scotland and England and Wales and the need for a comparative research focus within and beyond the UK.
- The need for academics and practitioners to respond to the rapidly evolving anti-social behaviour and Respect agendas, particularly in response to the change in Prime Minister and the new administration in Scotland.

For further information about the seminar series, please contact:

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