

ASB IN CHINGFORD MOUNT

A BUSINESS CASE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council's ASB Team has undertaken an investigation in respect of ASB at Albert Crescent/Chingford Mount Road (the "Mount") following repeated complaints about the activities of street drinkers at the location.

The purpose of the investigation was to collate evidence and take enforcement action against persistent offenders and to determine whether there was a case for implementing a Public Space Protection Order ("PSPO"), akin to the one presently in place in the south of the borough, to address problematic behaviours identified during the investigation.

An action plan was put in place which involved working in collaboration with both internal (CCTV operation, Neighbourhoods, Parks Team) and external partners (Police, ChangeGrowLive, Mental Health Services) to investigate and problem solve.

It was found that the Mount has become a gathering point for street drinkers who occupy the benches and tables at the location. Their activities were found to be the cause of a spectrum of activity stemming from nuisance and disruption at one end and harassment, criminality and violence at the other end. Those who engaged in the higher level of anti-social behaviour were made the subject of enforcement action. This included the use of ASB warnings, anti-social behaviour injunctions and police arrest with ensuing proceedings before the criminal courts.

The large majority of those who engaged in street drinking, low-level nuisance and ASB at the location, however, were only given advice and referred to partner agencies such as drug and alcohol treatment agencies on a voluntary basis. This was due to the fact that there is nothing in place at present which prohibits them from congregating at the location and consuming alcohol there. This was unlike the position in the south of the borough which has the benefit of PSPO which, amongst other things, seeks to curtail street drinking.

Links were made with local residents group and local businesses during the investigation. The overwhelming majority of those consulted complained about the activities of the street drinkers and the impact this had on them. From wider communications with local policing teams, councillors and residents' groups it was apparent that the activities of street drinkers were not limited to the Mount and that other area in the north of the borough including greens and parks were experiencing similar problems.

In light of the evidence collated during the investigation it is our view that there is a clear need for a PSPO in north of the borough as a tool for combatting the problematic behaviours identified and that the statutory conditions for introducing a PSPO are met. To limit the PSPO to specific locations in the north of the borough would be to run the risk of displacing the problems to areas not covered by the prohibitions.

If implemented, a PSPO would empower policing teams and the council's enforcement teams to enforce the restrictions set out within it with the power to impose fines and to pursue individuals for prosecution where this is deemed necessary. It is anticipated that a 'soft enforcement' approach would be adopted whereby first time offenders would be given a series of warnings and referred to agencies. This would ensure that the use and implementation of the PSPO is both targeted to deal with the specific problem which has been identified but is proportionate in the manner in which it is framed and the way in which it is enforced.

The implementation of a PSPO would provide an important tool to tackle ASB in the north of the borough and would send a clear message to both offenders and the general public alike that certain activities will no longer be tolerated and that the public should be entitled to use public spaces within the borough without being forced to endure ASB.