

Learning from: **Severe Maladministration**



**Taking the key lessons from our
severe maladministration decisions**

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Introduction

I have met many people who are proud to have grown up in social housing. It boasts strong, diverse communities and our country is enriched by it.

But, like all tenures, Antisocial Behaviour (ASB) can happen. Because social tenants can move less easily, the importance of good neighbourhood management is even greater. This ensures the benefits of building strong roots in communities through longer tenancies does not tip into feeling trapped when there is ASB.

It would be wrong to airbrush what happened to residents in these cases. But it can be appalling to read their experiences.

Frequently, children are impacted. They are reported as scared to leave their home or go to school.

Landlords are shown not acting on evidence. One resident who experiences nightly noise makes 115 recordings but is met by limited and late responses by their landlord.

Damage to property is left unrepaired. A resident whose windows were smashed waits 14 months for repairs, meanwhile they're boarded up. Another landlord takes 22 months to repair doors that could reduce noise.

Essential tools for effective ASB handling, including risk assessments or action plans, are either missing or mishandled. In one case this means a resident's mental health needs are overlooked.

In a few cases, resident's end their tenancies after poor ASB handling – losing a home which was meant to be safe and secure.

This report asks why we repeatedly see similar failings. It provides an opportunity for landlords to reflect on the fundamentals of ASB: what is their role, how to manage expectations, and where to work with others.

It offers 3 questions landlords to consider.

Firstly, what do hate incidents mean for social landlords? These incidents are not always about race. Antisocial Behaviour (ASB) directed towards disabled residents reoccurs in our investigations. These incidents require separate recording, policies, and procedures but this good practice may not be universal across the sector.

Secondly, how to coordinate repairs and ASB handling more effectively? We know the sector's challenges handling some repairs. Our recent Spotlight report, Repairing Trust explored this. These cases reinforce the need to modernise repairs and maintenance. It also underscores the importance of effective internal communication between teams holding different responsibilities.

Thirdly, what does good complaint handling look like in an ASB case? Like our role, complaint handlers job is not to investigate the ASB itself but examine its handling. This crucial second line of defence often falls short.

There has been significant improvement in complaint handling, and this is an undervalued (and sometimes under resourced) discipline within landlords. It can make a significant difference and perform well.

But in many cases, the complaints team were too passive. This can mean missed opportunities go unrecovered, such as conducting a risk assessment. Additionally, patterns are often missed, causing lost opportunities for organisational learning. The complaints process can also bring together other issues raised, such as property condition, into a single, coherent response. But each element can be poorly handled.

Clear, empathetic communication at this stage could restore the resident's confidence the landlord is listening. It can show the process has not lost sight of the person.

Yet in some of these cases, the communication at different stages was poor. This went beyond balancing relationships with both residents. Occasionally, taking a harm-based approach was lost.

Sitting behind poor communication can be inaction. It is for landlords to reflect on whether these are driven by cultural issues or inadequate knowledge and information management.

Overall, these cases also show how complex the role of a social landlord has become. The rise in vulnerabilities and mental health needs. The challenging circumstances of some of the residents who appear responsible for the ASB. The importance of better information sharing by local authorities with landlords when allocating properties.

The skills required within the landlord to handle these increasingly complex cases and effective networks with other agencies. The importance of addressing ASB caused by non-residents to reduce the impact on residents. The need to respond to changing public policy, including new measures in the Crime and Policing Bill.

This highlights the uniqueness of the social landlords role. I have met with some inspirational practitioners working on ASB since our last severe maladministration report in November. Their openness around learning lessons and absence of defensiveness is positive. We also find fewer service failings in ASB cases than in other areas.

Just pause to reflect on that. Given the challenges and individual nature of each case, this is a considerable achievement.

Richard Blakeway

Housing Ombudsman

The following report contains distressing references, including to suicide and self-harm.

Samaritans contact details

When life is difficult, Samaritans are here – day or night, 365 days a year. You can call them for free on 116 123, email them at jo@samaritans.org, or visit www.samaritans.org to find your nearest branch.

Hate crime and harassment

The consequences of hate crime and harassment can be significant. This can be on the grounds of gender, sexuality, or race.

Yorkshire Housing

In this case, **Yorkshire Housing** (202335775) failed to show it followed any of its policies despite daily harassment from the resident's neighbour.

This included name calling, drug use, and leaving soap suds all over her driveway. This distressed the resident due to her mobility needs and not wanting to slip.

The resident's disabled son also was subject to intimidation.

The landlord made a series of errors that worsened the resident's distress. It failed to account for the resident's vulnerabilities in how it has responded. It failed to appreciate how those vulnerabilities made the situation more difficult for her.

The resident feared retaliation. This limited the landlord's options. But the landlord did not go far enough to explore what options it could take with the resident to ease the distress.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has introduced a new customer guide, improved its communication during cases, and set up risk assessments and audits.

It also now quality checks a random selection of complaints responses. This ensures they fully address all the points raised. Additionally, it has improved its approach to partnership working in neighbourhoods to help tackle ASB.

Hackney Council

Hackney Council (202229549) failed to deal effectively with alleged racial-specific graffiti. The landlord's actions made the situation worse by failing to attempt any interpreting services with English not being this resident's first language.

The landlord did not respond in good time to the resident's reports of the graffiti. It also did not consider the risk of harm to the resident or family. The resident was trying to make serious allegations of the ASB but needed an interpreter. The landlord did not provide this, even though it knew she needed one.

This put her at a significant disadvantage and increased her distress, especially given the nature of the alleged graffiti. When a social worker raised concerns about the youngest child in the household, there's no evidence this was passed on. Nor did we see evidence the case was passed to the ASB panel, or a safeguarding referral was carried out.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has reviewed and amended policies and procedures. These now help speed up the sharing of information and provided training to all ASB officers to ensure procedures are accurately followed.

Learning from hate crime and harassment

Our casework shows residents can be subjected to hate crime and it can involve different protected characteristics. Landlords should examine their complaints to be confident they have the right support and approach in place.

Hate crime has specific connotations for the landlords handling. This should involve specific recording of incidents. It may mean the landlord requires a separate policy and procedure.

Effective policies of this kind see landlords taking early, firm, and effective action against alleged perpetrators, including those who do not respond to support offered. Landlords should also reflect on their communication when residents report hate crime to treat it with seriousness and sensitivity.

Wider than initial reports, landlords should monitor hate crime incidents across its homes. They should identify any persistent alleged perpetrators and use this information to improve services offered.

Multi-agency cooperation

Working with other agencies is often key to resolve ASB. Without effective partnership working, landlords are not taking advantage of the full range of tools at their disposal.

L&Q

L&Q (202309874) failed to take a multi-agency approach in this case. This led to a prolonging of the issues including non-residents using drugs and setting fires in communal areas.

The landlord did not fix the communal door to make it secure. This allowed non-residents to enter the block. The resident reported this problem many times.

The landlord correctly requested CCTV footage to identify how non-residents entered the block. However, it did not share this with police. This extended the problem and limited what actions the landlord could take.

The resident explained the handling of the ASB caused fear, upset, and distress. The resident said his children were scared to leave the property and go to school. He also had to clean-up needles himself.

The landlord says it has learned from this case. It now uses a new harm-centred approach to tackle problems like domestic abuse and hate crime.

It has also made changes to its approach to complaints handling and record keeping, prioritising efficiency and good communication, and embedding learning from complaints.

Learning from multi-agency cooperation

In more complex cases the landlord may need to work with other bodies to resolve ASB. This could be the police, who may be investigating incidents themselves, as well as the local authority and health agencies. This interaction could inform the landlords own risk assessment, action plan, and communication with the resident. The landlord may start the engagement or react to it. In some cases, this could become part of a formal, multiagency case review.

When partnerships work well, information is shared quickly. This allows for safe interventions that reduce risks and minimise resident distress. However, effective multiagency working can be undermined where there are limited resources, poor information sharing or poor relationship management. Landlords should consider whether those are underlying causes when reviewing complaints, and how to reduce them.

Landlords should not become too dependent on police action for outcomes. It should be a partnership, and it needs to fulfil its own management responsibilities. This extends to updating the resident on its partnership working and what that means for them.

Antisocial Behaviour (ASB) and repairs

In some cases, ASB can result in damage to a resident's property, which its repairs team needs to respond to, in line with its responsibilities.

Sanctuary

Sanctuary (202320294) failed to replace broken windows for 14 months following antisocial behaviour.

The damage happened when someone threw a brick through the resident's window. It took the landlord 75 working days to contact the resident about this. There is no evidence to show the landlord carried out a risk assessment. It also did not signpost the resident to the police.

Following this, the resident was attacked in his own home. The police immediately contacted the landlord to move the resident. But the landlord did not contact him until 47 working days later despite the safety implications for not doing so.

After the windows were broken, the landlord failed to repair them. It boarded up the window the next day. When it did attend months later, it said it could not complete the repair due to the resident being out. There is no evidence the landlord arranged an appointment. It offered a new appointment 4 months later.

In this time the landlord did put in extra security measures, but the resident reported the home being dark and restricting airflow. At the point of our decision, the window was not fixed.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has revised and updated its ASB related policies. It has made advances in the way it tracks, records, and measures the way it deals with ASB. This has been coupled with additional training and support for the teams who deal with ASB on the front line.

Learning from ASB and repairs

Events during an Antisocial Behaviour (ASB) case can lead to damage to a resident's home or can be made worse where there are disputes over issues such as boundaries. Without ASB, landlords would still be expected to respond in line with its repairs policy. But it may wish to prioritise the works where these repairs can be a contributing factor to the ASB.

Doing so will involve effective coordination and internal communication between different teams as well as involvement with the resident. Where repairs are delayed, this could cause serious distress to the resident.

It will also undermine trust in the landlord overall handling. Landlords should also be conscious of a resident reporting both ASB and unrelated disrepair, but the overall effect this living environment could be having on the resident. These were highlighted in our recent Spotlight report, Repairing Trust.

Where these concerns have shown to be present in a complaint, the landlord should explore why there was a disconnect between different teams.

Action plans

Action plans are an important way for residents to understand what the landlord is going to do. It can build trust between resident and landlord and show that a landlord is taking the issue seriously.

Peabody

Peabody (202405278) failed to put in place an action plan for a year. This is despite the escalation of the ASB, and the neighbour being arrested and charged with criminal offences.

This was a missed opportunity for the landlord to support the resident and adequately address the ASB at an early stage.

When the resident raised concerns about the safety of her family or the landlord was aware of breaches of bail, it should have again seen this as an opportunity to act. It could have worked with the resident to see what actions it could take to help.

Throughout this case there was also no risk assessment and poor communication.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has improved its approach to antisocial behaviour, safeguarding, and neighbour disputes. This includes clearer policies and guidance for staff to respond proportionately and empathetically. On top of this, it has improved complaint handling processes, improved record keeping, expanded support for vulnerable residents, and introduced more accessible contact channels.

Learning from action plans

A repeated cause of complaints about landlord handling of ASB stems from mismanaging expectations. This shows why landlords must clearly communicate what, when and how they will respond to the situation. Often this response can be made possible through an agreed action plan.

An action plan is a 2-way agreement with the resident. Landlords should take overall responsibility for starting it. But the plan will often include steps the resident will need to take, such as keeping diary sheets.

However, landlords should not use action plans just to buy time. They must take immediate steps to solve problems.

Therefore, a good action plan needs to be a working document, helping the landlord to respond quickly as situations develop. This can also reduce the stress and anxiety about the situation and provide confidence the landlord has heard their concerns.

The action plan can also support the landlord's communication. It can summarise when the resident can next expect contact from the landlord and when its progress will be reviewed. It also allows the landlord to make clear and consistent decisions which all colleagues can understand when they are involved on the case.

Risk assessments

When a resident reports Antisocial Behaviour (ASB), one of the earliest actions a landlord should take is a risk assessment. This may be to help the landlord assign the case a priority or because it is a high priority.

Tower Hamlets Community Housing

Tower Hamlets Community Housing (202309641) did not risk assess a resident. This is despite mental health concerns and the harmful effects of the ASB.

The ASB started with noise from a flat above and meant the resident had to move out of the home. The resident said the ongoing ASB was giving her suicidal thoughts. The response to the ASB by the landlord lacked empathy. Added information was not acted upon by the landlord.

No risk assessments were completed by the landlord at stage 2 despite the resident again mentioning her mental health concerns. This was not in line with its ASB policy.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has developed a proactive and transparent approach to ASB, centred on residents' needs. A new leadership team is in place and its ASB-related Tenant Satisfaction Measure has improved by 36% from 2024.

L&Q

L&Q (202317104) failed to assess the risk of harm to the resident and their family. There was a young child living at the property and reports of frequent drug use and ASB, including the threat of assault.

The landlord seemed to blame the resident for not making formal reports against specific neighbours when other residents did. The resident did not as they wanted to remain anonymous. The landlord used this to justify not upholding the complaint.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has introduced a new harm-centred approach to tackling these issues, including domestic abuse and hate crime. It has also made changes to its approach to complaints handling and record keeping, prioritising efficiency and good communication, and embedding learning from complaints.

Learning from risk assessments

A vital tool for landlords is risk assessing reports of ASB. The 2014 ASB Crime and Policing Act guidance requires risk assessments. Landlords must check for potential harm and vulnerabilities when they receive ASB reports.

Not doing risk assessments early puts everyone at a disadvantage. This often leads to service failures later in the case.

Landlords should verify if their policies include risk assessments and specify when to use them. Landlords should explore any disconnect between the policy and practice on the ground.

Landlords must spot and respond to residents' needs. This includes health issues, both physical and mental. This could influence the risk assessment and approach the landlord takes. Landlords could consider how these circumstances were recorded on its systems. It could also consider how the information was used and if there were any missed opportunities to identify.

The landlord may consider it needs to involve other services based on the circumstances of the resident. This could include signposting to appropriate support agencies or beginning safeguarding measures. Staff should update risk assessments whenever the resident's circumstances change.

Case handlers should also consider how the organisation responded to this information. A failure to adjust its service could mean a resident was more effected than another person. The landlord should reflect any shortcomings in how it makes things right. This could include whether it needs to apologise to the residents as well as considering redress.

Communications and complaint handling

During any ASB case, proactive and empathetic communications is a must.

Additionally, complaint handling can be a key way to restore a trusting relationship and provide redress where things have gone wrong.

Hexagon Housing

In this case, **Hexagon Housing** (202320056) was harsh and unempathetic in its communications. This is despite reports of violence, drug use, and harassment of the resident and her children.

The landlord also failed to communicate in a timely manner whenever there was a report.

The landlord was dismissive and showed no regard for the resident's vulnerabilities. The resident repeatedly told the landlord she was disabled and vulnerable. The landlord offered no reassurance or support. The landlord continued to communicate in a heavy handed, unsympathetic, and inappropriate manner throughout.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has rewritten its ASB policy and procedure. It establishes clearer timescales and better triage practices, reflects changes in its case management system and has better tools for monitoring performance. The landlord has rolled out a vulnerable persons and reasonable adjustments policy. It also introduced a mandatory training programme for all Neighbourhood Officers specifically for ASB handling. Finally, it set up a case review process and a satisfaction survey programme.

Waverley Council

In this case, **Waverley Council** (202413277) was poor in its communication following threatening behaviour from a neighbour.

It failed to respond to her reports of ASB and did not speak to the neighbour about the behaviour. The landlord failing to grasp the situation made it worse for the resident.

The landlord failed to resolve the issues around a garden boundary fence, which was the cause of the tension.

At the time of our decision, the landlord agreed to reinstate the resident on the housing waiting list. The issue itself remained unresolved.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it now ensures gardens of flats are clearly divided at the void stage. It now also provides a garden allocation plan to all residents when they take up their tenancy, so they know the garden space that has been allocated for their use. It has also carried out refresher training for all housing management staff on the requirements of antisocial behaviour and complaints handling policies. This emphasises the importance of good record keeping ensuring any required actions are progressed quickly and communicated to all those concerned.

Dartford Council

In this case, **Dartford Council** ([202329960](#)) failed in both its handling of the ASB but also in its complaint handling. This led to our service issuing a Complaint Handling Failure Order.

The landlord took no action to work with, update, or reassure the resident. It also could not show that it resolved the issues. These failures eventually led to her leaving her home.

In its complaint handling, the landlord failed to escalate the complaint or uphold it at stage 1, despite poorly handling the ASB. It did not explain why it was not escalating the complaint. It also failed to provide information to us, resulting in a complaint handling failure order.

This meant we had to investigate this case without seeing key policies and information such as action plans, risk assessments or communication records.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has provided ASB training. It has also reviewed its internal communications channels to ensure all staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in keeping residents up to date regarding ASB, tenancy management, and/or complaint responses.

Learning from communications and complaint handling

Home is an emotional place and experiencing ASB can cause deep distress. Persistent or repeated ASB can have a debilitating effect on residents, even more so over a period.

We have previously proposed the 4 Ts of effective communication: timely, transparent, tailored and appropriate tone. This approach also applies to ASB communication. Landlords need to balance empathy with impartiality. This matters when working with multiple residents and while keeping resident safety the priority. Landlords can consider whether it and the resident would benefit from a contact arrangement to guide involvement. This could form part of any action plan.

When it comes to complaint handling, landlords can confuse whether the resident's complaint is about ASB or the landlord's response to it.

This happens when landlords let different service teams handle complaints instead of using one central team. Landlords should also ensure they have a clear distinction between service requests and complaints, as per the Complaint Handling Code. These separate issues should be triaged accordingly. This not only helps landlords recover any service failures in the individual case. It also helps learning from its complaints to improve its handling of ASB overall.

Noise

Our [Spotlight report on noise](#) is clear about how landlords should tackle noise transference and noise relating to ASB. There are times when the 2 overlap, and these cases show how landlords missed opportunities to resolve the situation.

Guinness Partnership

Guinness Partnership (202325641) failed to deal with an ASB and noise case for nearly 2 years. This led to the resident feeling suicidal and having to leave her home.

The resident reported multiple times over the 2 years, with excessive banging, drug use and altercations. The landlord noted she was getting more distressed each call.

The landlord's risk assessment classed the case as low risk and there not being any health consequences. A later letter from the GP asked the landlord to urgently review this. The landlord also received an email from the resident's employer about her welfare.

The landlord failed to act against the neighbour, including even informal or formal warnings. This led to the police not taking any further action. The landlord was not without evidence either. The resident had noise monitoring equipment and diary sheets.

Much of the action taken by the landlord was too late. It took the landlord 22 months to repair the doors that were causing much of the noise. The failure to act early meant the relationship between all parties broke down completely.

In the end, the resident said the repairs did not resolve the situation and she moved out.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has created new policies and training programmes. It has also completed a full restructure of its ASB service, introducing new Safe Neighbourhood roles with increased local presence.

Its systems have also been updated to improve case management, record keeping and performance management.

Luton Council

Luton Council (202420326) failed to take timely action to deal with noise and ASB that the resident described as “living hell”.

Despite filling in diary sheets and concerns raised by the resident’s MP, the landlord took no action. This may have been due to its concerns over the neighbour’s vulnerabilities.

It took the landlord 4 months from this first report to take action. It then took a further 5 months to classify it as statutory noise nuisance.

Over 9 months the resident sent 115 noise recordings for the landlord. These reports included loud music, talking, swearing, shouting, partying, and singing. The evidence shows the resident’s reports included disturbances throughout the night.

The landlord served an abatement notice but this was soon breached, and it took no action. It later took further enforcement action, but this also did not resolve the ASB.

At the point of our decision, the ASB was ongoing.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has undertaken a thorough review of its antisocial behaviour service. It has also brought in independent external support to work with its Tenant Partnership Board on a new ASB policy. It has also introduced new joint working protocols that clarify and explicitly state responsibilities and hand off points so that this issue does not occur again. The landlord also introduced a new vulnerability and inclusive services policy. This was supplemented by additional training for staff on identifying and supporting customers with vulnerabilities and refresher training on the management of antisocial behaviour.

Metropolitan Thames Valley

Metropolitan Thames Valley (202325312) did not deal with alleged drug dealing/taking and fighting on the street outside her home. It said the issues were outside of its remit.

The landlord did not offer any advice or support to the resident as she continued to raise issues. It failed to investigate whether the perpetrators were residents of the landlord. It also didn't assess how the noise was affecting her.

There is also no evidence the landlord took part in any multi-agency work to resolve the issue. Considering this could have affected other residents and therefore led to more complaints, it should have done more.

The landlord also did not have any records of its communications with the resident.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has updated its ASB policy to reflect issues such as in the above case. It has also improved its internal review and scrutiny of its antisocial processes through regular reporting to Board. The landlord is currently undertaking a review of its antisocial behaviour policies and procedures. Residents have been involved in this process.

Waverley Council

Waverley Council (202314489) failed to treat a noise case with enough urgency. It missed opportunities to resolve the problem. This made the resident anxious in her own home.

The neighbour regularly screamed at people, was verbally aggressive when confronted, and had loud dogs that kept the resident awake.

After an internal review, the landlord closed the case at one point. Only to reopen it 2 months later when the resident reported the issues were still ongoing. It failed to treat this as noise nuisance. Instead, it termed it as a neighbour dispute. There were no counter allegations at this time to warrant that approach.

The dogs barking kept her children awake at night, and the neighbour was swearing and shouting at her. The resident reported this to environmental health, but the situation continued.

When the neighbour made a counter allegation, the landlord treated it as equal to the resident's long series of reports. The landlord then failed to implement any actions from its case review meeting.

Due to the landlord's inaction, the resident says the situation has escalated. This has included assault by the neighbour. At the point of our decision, this was unresolved.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it is working closely with its contractors to ensure improved service. This will be monitored over the coming months. It has also carried out further complaints handling training for all relevant staff who are now actively encouraged to offer residents a remedy at stage 1, where appropriate.

Learning from noise

Noise nuisance can seriously undermine community cohesion and resident's well-being. We have previously highlighted how landlords can conflate noise transference with ASB. This means they miss opportunities for preventative work through an effective good neighbourhood policy.

However, in these cases, the noise reported was integral to handling the ASB. They show the particularly debilitating effect that noise can have on the resident reporting it. Often noise can be a symptom of other activities that are the root cause of ASB but the landlord risks losing sight of, such as illegal sub-letting.

Where this happens, an opportunity can be missed to resolve the issue rather than manage the effect of it. Similarly, responding to noise nuisance can involve liaison with other parties, such as the police or environmental health. It is important this coordination is effective, and the resident is clear what each body is doing. For local authority landlords, this involves effective internal communication, which can sometimes be absent.

Centre for Learning resources

Spotlight report on noise – time to be heard

Noise key topics page containing reports, podcasts and case studies.

Antisocial Behaviour (ASB) key topics page containing reports, podcasts and case studies.

Knowledge and information management key topics page containing reports, podcasts and case studies.

Knowledge and information management eLearning and workshops available on the Learning Hub.

The Complaint Handling Code

Complaint Handling Code e-learning and workshops available on the Learning Hub.