

Agencies should publicise positive results – one way this can be done is through leaflet drops (these can be cost effective when targeted appropriately).

Witness support is an area where the benefits of partnership working can be clearly seen: local authorities and the police have different skills and resources and can combine them to give well-rounded support.

Methods of supporting witnesses currently being used by agencies also include:

- enclosing a letter with the summons advising the respondent to stay away from witnesses;
- a higher police presence in the vicinity;
- giving witnesses the personal mobile telephone number of a named police officer who can be called if they are threatened;
- visits from neighbourhood wardens at pre-arranged times (sometimes daily); and
- phone calls from the local authority at pre-arranged times.

The interim order enables witnesses to be protected from the outset of the court process. Sections 48 and 49 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 make it an offence to intimidate witnesses in civil proceedings such as those for ASBOs.

Improving protection of witnesses in court

Manchester City Council protects witnesses

Issue

Witnesses felt anxious about giving evidence. Their concerns included the prospect of appearing in court, coming face to face with defendants and being threatened by defendants at the court building, as well as uncertainties about waiting room and refreshment facilities.

Approach

Manchester City Council negotiated the following arrangements with local courts for anti-social behaviour cases:

- access to a quiet room for witnesses;
- a video link for perpetrators in prison where it would be expensive to bring them back for an ASBO or injunction hearing (this also has the benefit of being less stressful for the witnesses);
- a video link for children and young people; and
- police presence, where appropriate.

In addition, the council provides practical information and support to witnesses. They are made aware of what to expect, including the court layout, where they and the defendant(s) will be sitting and how people will be dressed. Practical support also includes transport to and from the court, being met by a council officer on arrival and information about refreshment and bathroom facilities.

Outcome

The result has been reassurance and physical security for witnesses. This has led to a reduction in the anxiety about the prospect of appearing in court or accidentally meeting a defendant. Witnesses are better able to focus on the case. The case manager is also able to keep witnesses informed of progress and to manage the case more effectively.

Contact

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