

The South Beach Selective Licensing Scheme - Key Findings and Lessons Learned

1.0 Introduction

Blackpool Council's first Selective Licensing programme was introduced in the South Beach area in March 2012 for a period of five years. The scheme was adopted due to high levels of anti-social behaviour associated with private rented property in the area and it was believed that the introduction of a selective licensing scheme along with other measures would improve management of privately rented properties and thereby lead to an improvement in the social conditions in the area.

1.1 The objectives for the Licensing Scheme in South Beach were to:

- Improve property standards within the private rented sector;
- Reduce transience and churn by attracting a good calibre of residents, encouraging them to settle in the area on a long term basis, helping to create stable communities;
- Help raise perceptions of the area amongst residents and the wider community;
- Reduce the levels of anti-social behaviour and crime.

1.2 Selective Licensing was intended to be one of part of a wider series of measures to promote improvements in the management of private rented properties, increasing standards across the sector. Blackpool Council looked to also provide:

(a) A better residential offer

Actions have been taken to address the underlying imbalance in the housing offer in South Beach and ensure that the on-going transition from guest house to residential use leads to a mix of better quality homes. Investment at Crystal Road and Rawcliffe Street did help establish better residential character and home ownership but were limited in extent and came to an end early into the life of the selective licensing scheme. The Foxhall Village development has also added to the mixed residential offer, with a higher standard of property and levels of home ownership, leading to a more sustainable community. At the end of the programme, My Blackpool Home has been able to acquire properties in this area, reduce their density, and bring them up to a more desirable standard.

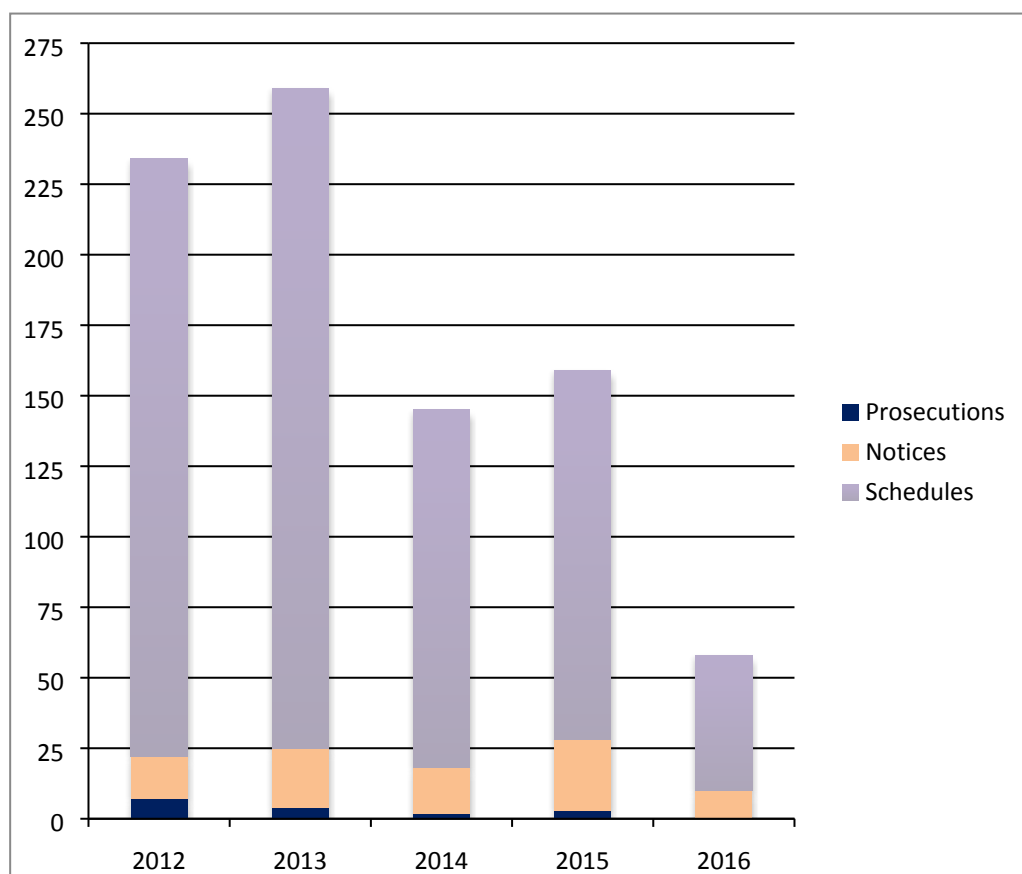
(b) Supporting existing residents and establishing a stronger community

While Selective Licensing addressed property management in the private rented sector, other measures also sought to help tackle anti-social behaviour and enable residents to become more settled. In particular, investment by Public Health in a small team to reach out to residents and get them plugged into support and community activities has run alongside the licensing programme. This formed an important part of the comprehensive property inspection programme that ran across the area for 12-15 months from late 2012. A community drop-in to provide mutual support for isolated individuals has continued at St Peter's Church throughout the programme.

- 1.3 The inspection programme ensured compliance with the licensing conditions, and was also used to identify any other property condition issues. The inspections were undertaken in partnership with the Police and Fire Service. The Police were available to deal with any illicit activity and offer reassurance to residents and the Fire service carried out fire safety checks; gave advice and fitted free smoke detectors.
- 1.4 An Anti-Social Behaviour Officer was based in the area and dealt with enquiries and complaints of anti-social behaviour from landlords and tenants. The dedicated Anti-Social Behaviour Officer encouraged higher levels of reporting through an increased capacity to resolve complaints.

2.0 A review of the impact of licensing on poor property condition

2.1 The licensing scheme has led to significant work to address poor property conditions; 752 schedules of work were issued to landlords for breaching the basic Housing Health and Safety Rating System standards, with 87 notices served, and 16 prosecutions for failure to take the required action.



This is in an area of 875 licensed properties. The reducing number of schedules and notices over time reflects both a less intensive approach after the initial inspection programme, but also improving conditions in the area.

2.2 Licensing schemes of this nature have allowed officers to get behind the doors of some of the most vulnerable people in our town. The multi-agency approach has allowed the Council to address poor property conditions whilst at the same time actively working with landlords and tenants to address these vulnerabilities, and educate landlords on providing better standards of management for their tenants.

- 2.3 Thanks to the multi-agency approach taken to the inspection programme, by the end of the scheme over 48% of South Beach residents had received some level of engagement, from registration with basic health services, to support into employment.
- 2.4 Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service were able to offer free fire safety advice, whilst also assisting landlords in risk management within their properties, in some cases significantly decreasing the chance of a fire related incident.
- 2.5 Blackpool Council commissioned research to explore stakeholders' perceptions of the South Beach licensing scheme. The majority of stakeholders were generally positive about selective licensing and both its role in improving standards across the private rented sector and the wider approach to improving people's lives within the area.
- 2.6 Overall the multi-agency approach was well received by stakeholders, reflecting positively on the impact on staff morale and adopting new working models; interventions and support have been successfully offered to individuals who were 'under the radar' and would not have been identified by other methods. Stakeholders felt that more planning before the scheme started would have strengthened the understanding of all partners of expected outcomes, roles and responsibilities and information sharing requirements.
- 2.7 However, some other stakeholders were unclear of the impact that the scheme has had on the area, with landlords in particular critical of some of the approaches and communication. More work is needed to build the relationship between public sector agencies and landlords, particularly around communication and enabling better landlords to play a greater role in delivering positive outcomes in the area.

3.0 A review of the impact of licensing on Anti-Social Behaviour and Crime reporting ¹

- 3.1 Provided below is an overview of anti-social behaviour and crime data for the South Beach area. For both anti-social behaviour and crime, the first graph details average anti-social behaviour /crime data for privately rented properties in the area, which has been mapped for us by the Police analyst using northings and eastings information. The second graph provides average anti-social behaviour /crime data for the whole of the licensed area, regardless of tenure. The curved line across each graph represents the mean average over the data period.
- 3.2 Anti-social behaviour in both the privately-rented sector properties and full area graphs highlights the increased reporting of anti-social behaviour during the summer months, due to increased levels particularly around youth nuisance during this

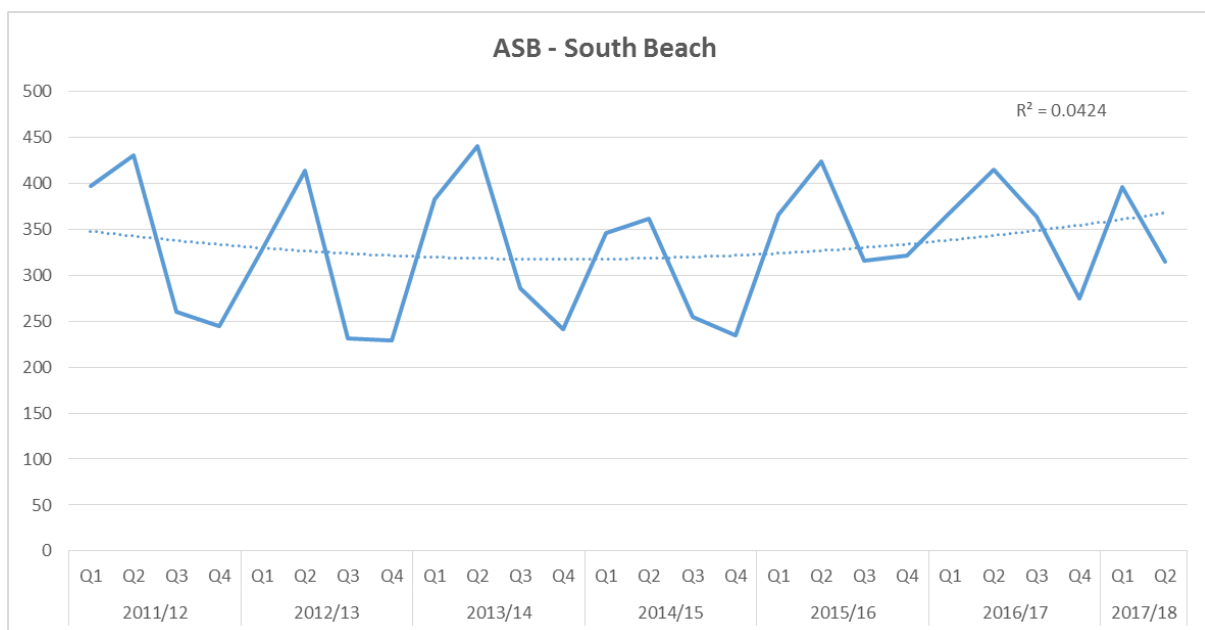
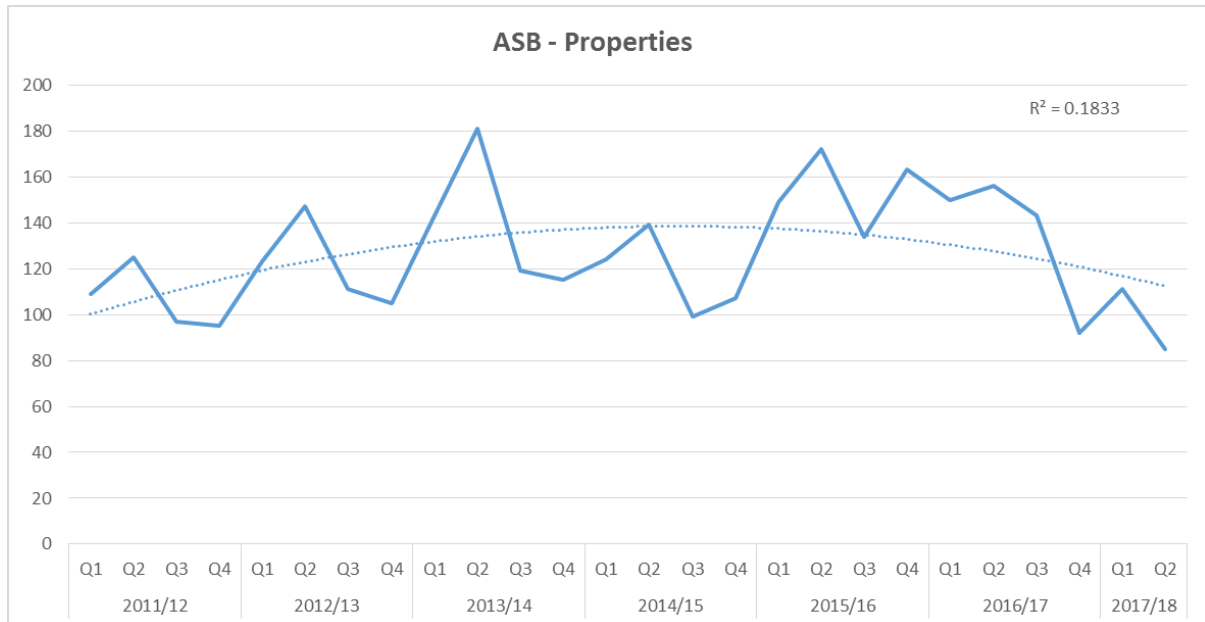
¹ ASB and Crime figures provided by Lancashire Constabulary

period. This peak can be seen for each year consistently. The mean average over the data period shows that levels of anti-social behaviour have remained fairly static, seeing a reduction at the end of the scheme compared to the beginning.

- 3.3 There are many factors affecting reported levels of anti-social behaviour. For example, increased resources in an area may in fact result in an increase in reporting – residents feeling empowered and confident to report without fear of reprisals. The presence of an Anti-Social Behaviour Officer in the area should encourage this increased level of reporting.
- 3.4 The Anti-Social Behaviour Officer in the area has been working to resolve incidents in South Beach. A local residents group has lobbied to retain this role because they can report matters in confidence and know that action will be taken. Detailed below are some case studies where the role has seen positive results:
- The Police were in receipt of low level intelligence regarding street level drug dealing. Intelligence was not sufficiently verified to obtain a warrant in respect of the address. Working with the Anti-Social Behaviour Officer and local Neighbourhood Policing Officers they visited neighbouring properties and obtained statements under anti-social behaviour legislation (anonymised). Following on from this they created a “Cone Cam”; a motion activated camera concealed within a traffic cone, to monitor the rear of the premises. Over several weeks they were able to demonstrate sufficient suspicious activity and obtain relevant intelligence to justify a drugs warrant. Following the execution of the warrant, drugs activity ceased and local businesses and residents expressed their thanks;
 - A tenant with drug and alcohol issues causing annoyance to local residents. The Anti-Social Behaviour Officer began by speaking with the landlord who stated he had done all he could and was now pursuing an eviction. The Anti-Social Behaviour Officer assisted him by issuing a Community Protection Warning and arranging for the support team to engage with the tenant. Over a period of several months the Anti-Social Behaviour Officer paid regular visits to tenant and ultimately issued a Community Protection Notice. The Anti-Social Behaviour Officer then supported the landlord further by supplying an evidential statement regarding interventions with the tenant in order to assist him in obtaining a possession order;
 - A vulnerable couple were being victimised by local youths over a period of several months resulting in a large number of Police logs and call outs. The Anti-Social Behaviour Officer sourced funding for target hardening measures at the couples’ address. He then developed action plan with local Police to ensure a number of disruption tactics including the overt installation of two cameras. As result of these measures the ASB Officer succeeded in identifying two local youths who were

subsequently interviewed and cautioned by Police colleagues. As a result the number of incidents dropped to zero.

South Beach anti-social behaviour Figures 2011/12 – 2017/18



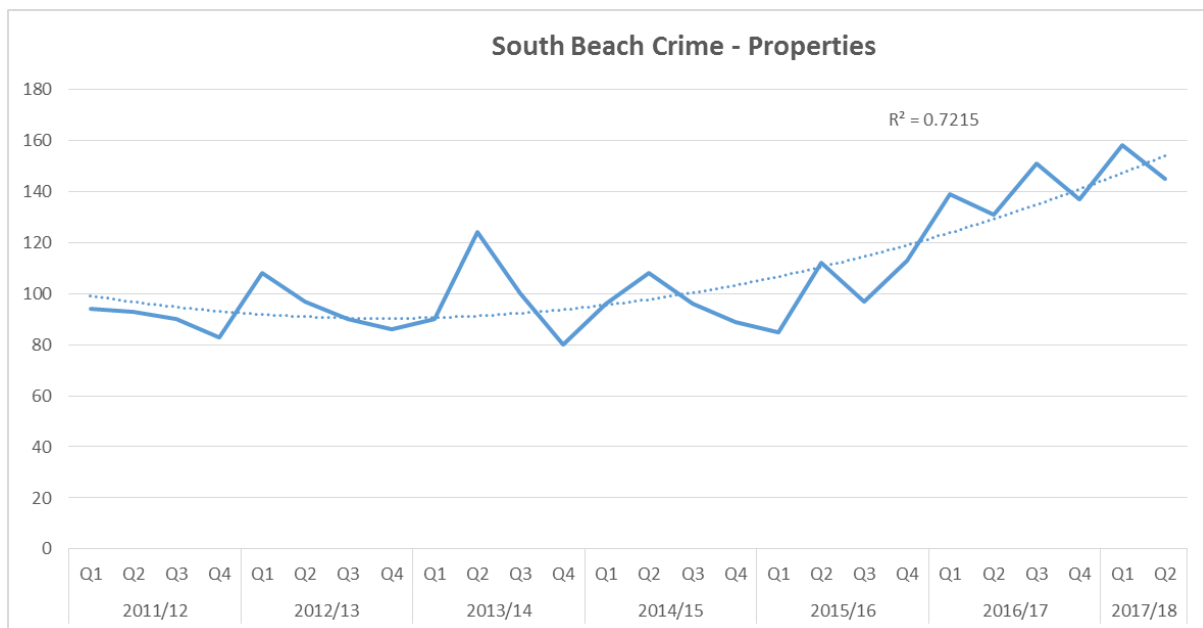
3.5 Crime figures in the area have shown an increase. We are working with Lancashire Constabulary to break this down and understand why this is the case. However what we are able to determine at this point is that according to the most recent published

ONS Crime data,² crime across England and Wales has gone up consistently. Some of the suggested reasons for this include continuing improvements made to recording systems within Police forces across the country and also of course, genuine increases in some categories of crime.

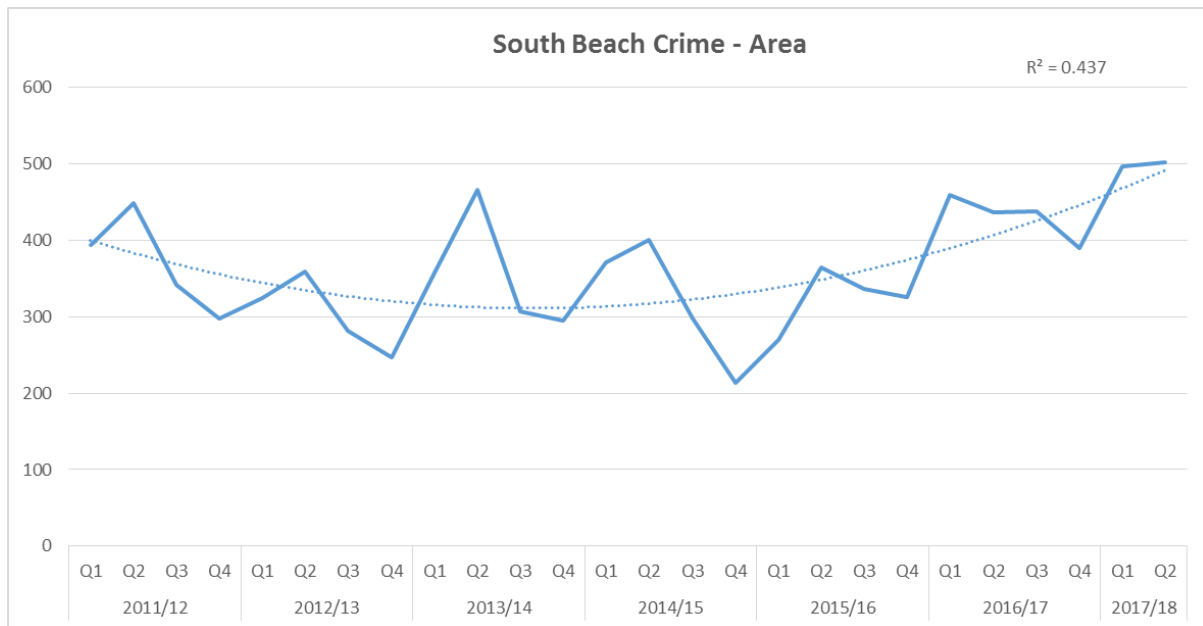
3.6 Data obtained from Lancashire Constabulary – which at the time of writing this report is provisional and has not yet been finalised nor published by ONS – shows that **bar one** Police Force across England and Wales, **all** have seen significant increases in crime.

3.7 The provisional data comparison from April - August 2017 compared with the same period in 2016, shows an approximate increase in crime of 16% across Lancashire. The provisional figures show an estimated average increase of around 24%, with some other Police Forces in the North West seeing increases of over 50%.

South Beach Crime Figures 2011/12 – 2017/18



² Crime in England and Wales: year ending June 2017. Obtained from www.ons.gov.uk



4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 Deprivation levels across the inner areas of Blackpool are the highest in the country. Selective Licensing in South Beach has enabled the comprehensive inspection programme to access and support the most vulnerable individuals and families, and get behind the front doors of the properties in which they live. Poor property condition has been identified across the area; and housing enforcement officers have had to step in and issue many hundred schedules of work to bring these properties up to the minimum standard as detailed in the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System.
- 4.2 Multi-agency working has assisted in tackling the most prolific offenders in the area and encouraged heightened reporting of anti-social behaviour from residents, tenants and landlords alike. Officers have supported the South Beach community and provided extra resources to tackle the issues of most importance to those who live there.