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7 **Title: ‘The Impact of Dispersal Powers on Congregating Youth’**  
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14 Structured Abstract  
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18 Purpose:  
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20 To present research which evaluated the impact of Dispersal Orders in an English town.  
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25 Design/Methodology/Approach:  
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27 The study used a mixed method design to, qualitatively, explore the impact of the  
28 intervention on young people and, quantitatively, the impact on recorded crime/anti-social  
29 behaviour.  
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36 Findings:  
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38 The use of Dispersal Orders in the town being studied highlighted a number of issues  
39 detrimental to young people. Powers appeared to be used to control the congregating rather  
40 than anti-social behaviour of young people and their use could increase young peoples’  
41 feelings of vulnerability.  
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49 Practical Implications:  
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51 The findings suggest that Dispersal Orders (and the newer Public Spaces Protection Orders)  
52 may be ineffective if they are used without the focus of a specific anti-social behaviour issue.  
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### Social Implications:

The findings suggest that the use of Dispersal Orders to deal with non anti-social behaviour issues are likely to alienate young people and have the potential to inadvertently place them at further risk. They also suggest that the Public Spaces Protection Order could very well exacerbate the substantial issues which have been identified in the present research.

### Originality/Value:

This research is original and suggests that the negative findings of earlier pieces of research into Dispersal Orders can be replicated in very different geographical environments and in areas with low levels of general deprivation where no substantial anti-social behaviour issues were identified. Furthermore, it uses original data to contextualise contemporary developments in anti-social behaviour, namely the introduction of Public Spaces Protection Orders.

### **Introduction**

The origins of the Dispersal Order are to be found in the anti-social behaviour agenda which, in the United Kingdom, has led to a profound shift in the practices, discourses and focus of criminal justice over recent years. Key to understanding the power, the attraction and the criticisms of the anti-social behaviour agenda is its founding principle of subjectivity. Anti-social behaviour in England and Wales is defined under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 s 1(1)(A) as acting, ‘in a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as himself’. This key milestone of recent legislative history has attracted descriptions such as ‘capacious’ (Crawford, 2008), ‘ill-

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3 defined' (Crawford, 2008), and 'subjective' (Prior, 2009). This definitional ambiguity (Prior,  
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5 2009), coupled with a scarcity of empirical data concerning the extent of the anti-social  
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7 behaviour problem and the effectiveness of policies introduced to counter it, has led to an  
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9 incoherent knowledge base that makes anti-social behaviour such a potent policy focus  
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11 (Prior, 2009). At the same time, according to Squires (2006), the widespread perception of a  
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13 'justice gap' meant that anti-social behaviour, and our fear of it, had become a central  
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15 concern for the British public. This process was aided by the Home Office and the media  
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17 perpetuating demonising rhetoric which succeeded in conflating anti-social behaviour with  
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19 the behaviour of young people. As part of the Government's response to such concerns, Part  
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21 4 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2003) (ss. 30-36) introduced dispersal powers which  
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23 authorized the police in England and Wales to break up gatherings (in designated areas) of  
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25 two or more people that were considered to present a recurrent threat of anti-social behaviour.  
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32 This research is significant in that it draws attention to the consequences of using Dispersal  
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34 Orders in very different geographic locations (characterized by different dynamics of social  
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36 exclusion) to those where existing research has taken place. In this respect, the present  
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38 research provides a notably different location (i.e. a coastal town), and context, to the  
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40 research of Crawford and Lister (2007) that focused on predominantly urban areas.  
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42 Additionally, where their research sites had identifiable crime/anti-social behaviour issues  
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44 associated with young people, the area drawn upon for this research had no substantive  
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46 crime/anti-social behaviour issues specifically associated with young people. For this locality,  
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48 the foremost concern for those who supported the use of dispersal powers was of the  
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50 'congregating' behaviour, rather than the anti-social or criminal behaviour, of young people,  
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52 an issue previously articulated by Smithson and Flint (2006). Furthermore, this research  
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3 provides us with information with which to speculate about the impact of the Public Space  
4 Protection Order, a bolstering of previous dispersal powers, which was introduced in 2014.  
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10 *Public Spaces Protection Orders*  
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14 Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) were introduced in 2014, under the Anti-Social  
15 Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act, and allow for the formal restriction of activities that can  
16 be engaged in within a specific designated area by those who enter that location. This act,  
17 through modifying existing dispersal powers, ensured that PSPOs have become the primary  
18 mechanism with which to control geographical space due to offering an enhanced  
19 combination of versatility and control. For example, whilst dispersal orders were introduced  
20 as a response to anti-social behaviour, the PSPO focuses more widely on behaviour which  
21 has, ‘...a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality’ and which is  
22 ‘unreasonable’ (Home Office, 2014, p.46). Likewise, the PSPO offers greater flexibility in  
23 that its powers can be applied to individuals as well as to groups of people. Finally, PSPOs  
24 can be put in place for an initial period of three years with an option to extend, if necessary,  
25 whereas authorisation for Dispersal Orders could not exceed six months.  
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43 These powers have proved attractive to a number of local authorities. For example, Bassetlaw  
44 Council, in Nottinghamshire, have proposed a PSPO to be put in place that would prohibit,  
45 “...under 16 year olds (who are not under the effective control of a parent or are [sic]  
46 responsible person aged 18 or over) gathering in groups of three or more” (Bassetlaw District  
47 Council, 2015). Similarly, another broad-ranging PSPO was introduced in Cheshire which  
48 banned a range of behaviours including that of wearing 'disguise', depicted on the signage  
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3 prepared for the area under the order by an image of a youth wearing a hooded top (Clay,  
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5 2015).  
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10 Whilst academic commentary on the PSPO has yet to emerge, campaigners and journalists  
11  
12 have drawn attention to this new form of control over public space. For example, Liberty  
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14 (2015) suggests that the targets of such powers are inadequately defined, that the powers are  
15  
16 too punitive and that they will criminalise vulnerable groups. Likewise, Garrett (2015),  
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18 writing in The Guardian newspaper, suggests that PSPOs may be attractive to some local  
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20 authorities given their synergy with urban regeneration agendas, an issue also associated with  
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22 Dispersal Orders (see Kennelly and Watt, 2013).  
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## 25 26 27 **Issues** 28

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32 Some key concerns about the anti-social behaviour agenda, in relation to dispersal powers,  
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34 will be addressed in the following sections.  
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### 37 38 *Anti-Social Behaviour and Young People* 39

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42 Distinctions between 'old' and 'young', the 'established' and 'newcomers', are not new  
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44 social phenomena (Elias and Scotson, 1994) and can be perceived as central to ongoing and  
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46 embedded inter-generational tensions (Muncie, 2015) that impact negatively upon the young.  
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48 Central to these often territorially-driven conflicts are, according to Elias and Scotson (1994),  
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50 moves by the excluded to resist the inferior status ascribed to them by the established groups  
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52 who seek to maintain their supremacy. Simultaneously, these informal and localised  
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54 processes are reinforced by the combined efforts of the state and media to legitimise these  
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3 constructions of problematic youth. As Young (2009) notes, “The amorphous grouping of the  
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5 young people on the street becomes reconstructed into the hierarchical structure of the gang  
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7 by the targeting of police patrols and the persuasive narratives of the mass media (p. 7). In  
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9 this way, young people fall victim to socially constructed depictions of youth behaviour that  
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11 lead others to judge them negatively.  
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16 Such processes are widespread and may enable us to understand some of the reasons for the  
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18 rise of the anti-social behaviour agenda. What is interesting is that these types of tension  
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20 appear to have become acknowledged as legitimate. Jamieson (2012), for example, notes how  
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22 anti-social behaviour occupies an uneasy and unarticulated position between social and  
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24 criminal justice policy. Likewise, she notes that it is this ambiguity that has facilitated the  
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26 ‘criminalization of social policy’ around young people, and led to the, “construction of a  
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28 ‘responsibilised’ and ‘adulterised’ young offender” (p. 460) that underplays the  
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30 vulnerabilities associated with youth. It should be noted, also, that concerns around these  
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32 processes pre-date the emergence of the anti-social behaviour agenda and were articulated as  
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34 far back as 1990 with the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile  
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36 Delinquency (Rodger, 2008).  
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43 Burney (2009 a) suggests that these criminalising processes have become embedded in the  
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45 practices of the police who have increasingly conflated anti-social behaviour and youth  
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47 behaviour, a process common throughout wider society, according to Squires (2006). Young  
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49 people who use public space and who congregate together for leisure purposes, according to  
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51 Burney, are increasingly attracting condemnation for those very reasons. Thus, “Public space  
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53 is presented as a contested arena in which adults are asked to assume that younger people  
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55 have lesser rights” (Burney, 2009 a, p. 72). These judgements lack any substantive base bar  
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3 for the fact that ‘others’ have taken exception to the group. Burney (2009 b) suggests that  
4 anti-social behaviour is a mere slogan used for, “targeting individuals whose behaviour  
5 upsets the public” (p. 37). The advent of the coalition government in 2010, notes Jamieson  
6 (2012), accelerated this process of ‘social panopticonism’ (p. 460) and looks likely to ensure  
7 that social policy will continue to target young people over the coming years. According to  
8 Kennelly and Watt (2013), who explored the impact of dispersal powers during the London  
9 Olympics of 2012, young people perceived that their non-criminal behaviour was being  
10 interpreted, unfairly, as criminal or threatening. The net effect of the use of such powers was  
11 that of, “...criminalizing youthful sociability in urban public spaces” (2013, p.3). What is of  
12 concern here, therefore, is that the powers afforded initially by Dispersal Orders and, latterly,  
13 by the more powerful PSPOs may facilitate and further legitimate the type of processes  
14 described above.  
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### 32 *Location, Congregation and Social Capital*

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36 The control of social spaces through dispersal powers draws us to some important issues  
37 around location, the reasons why young people congregate and the impact upon social capital  
38 of inhibiting congregation. Social geographers are increasingly viewing age as a key  
39 determinant of how people access and experience particular locations and physical spaces.  
40 Correspondingly, young people are increasingly facilitating our understanding of how  
41 interaction (including conflict and tension) between age groups in particular locations  
42 impacts on people’s identities.  
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54 **Although** the concept of location is integral to any understanding of powers that seek to exert  
55 control upon social spaces, it appears particularly germane to a piece of research that focusses  
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3 on such issues within an English coastal town. First, no published research has explored the  
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5 use of dispersal powers within such an environment. Second, as Smith (2012) shows, coastal  
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7 towns, while subject to the processes of social change that impact on communities more  
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9 generally, are also liable to be impacted by more specific processes that lead to further or  
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11 different forms of segregation between social groups.  
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16 Agarwal and Blunt's (2006) work is particularly helpful in exploring the dynamics of social  
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18 exclusion in coastal towns. They suggest that the impacts of social exclusion reach beyond  
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20 the forms experienced and reported in inner-city and rural areas as coastal economies are  
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22 driven by particular dynamics linked to industry and employment. Furthermore, populations  
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24 might include higher than average proportions of elderly and young people. One implication  
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26 of their work is to suggest that findings from research conducted in urban or rural areas might  
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28 have limited use in explaining the impact of dispersal powers in coastal towns, not least  
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30 because of the particular demographic polarisation of old and young that they identify in such  
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32 communities.  
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39 Another issue to be addressed here concerns the reasons why young people congregate in  
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41 groups in public space. 'Deficit' models of youth behaviour (Brooks, 2009, Osler and  
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43 Starkey, 2003) propose that youth is a unique lifestage and that the behaviour and attitudes of  
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45 young people are seen as inherently problematic and appropriate for intervention. In doing so,  
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47 young people are viewed as a 'social problem', a form of reasoning which appears to  
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49 underpin both dispersal powers and the PSPO.  
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54 However, Watt and Stenson (1998) found that young people tended to congregate in  
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56 particular locations due to an affinity with the area, a lack of ease of access to transport and  
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3 feelings of vulnerability. The latter point, especially, appears to have specific relevance to the  
4 experiences of female and middle-class young people. The class issue, also, may be  
5 significant to the present study given that the town where the research took place held a low  
6 rank for a number of correlates of deprivation. The 'localism' referred to by Watt and  
7 Stenson may also be exacerbated by the fact that one of the key barriers to the regeneration of  
8 coastal resorts has been insufficient investment in transport systems (Walton and Browne,  
9 2010). Taking such ideas into account, we are left with a counter-narrative to the 'deficit'  
10 model where youths publicly congregate together to overcome feelings of vulnerability,  
11 because of difficulties in accessing other social spaces and because, quite simply, they  
12 identify with particular locations. Similarly, location, according to Hopkins (2010), becomes  
13 bound up with ideas of identity to young people and, as a result, young people's identities  
14 change between geographic spaces. The importance of location as a 'marker of identity'  
15 (p.11) is often misunderstood by adults and leads to external attempts to re-establish control  
16 of public space.

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36 To Shildrick and MacDonald (2008), informal support from key reference groups such as  
37 family and friends is invaluable as a means of overcoming a range of negative impacts, from  
38 social exclusion to poverty. Additionally, they highlight the divisive powers of new  
39 regulations, in terms of disrupting an individual's bonds with peers and their shared  
40 environment, and show how they may impact negatively on young people's ability to build  
41 social capital. Likewise, Raffo and Reeves (2000) suggest that young people may congregate,  
42 in public, as a means of problem-solving structural issues that are imposed upon them. From  
43 this perspective, disrupting groups of congregating young people may have severe impacts on  
44 their ability to develop social capital and this may further disadvantage them throughout their  
45 life course.

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## Methodology

The aim of this project was to assess the impact and effectiveness of the introduction of dispersal areas in a coastal town in the South of England (referred to as 'Southtown') and utilised a mixed-methods approach. Mixed-methods approaches can be adopted for a variety of rationale, according to Burke Johnson and Christensen (2014), such as 'triangulation', 'complementarity', 'development', 'initiation' and 'expansion'. In this case, the method was used for 'expansion' as it allowed for the use of two different methodologies to explore two separate components of the research brief. The quantitative element focused on the impact of Dispersal Orders on recorded levels of crime and anti-social behaviour, whilst the qualitative elements focussed on perceived impacts on young people.

The qualitative data were generated through 15 semi-structured interviews (with two police officers, three police community support officers (PCSOs), two local councillors, five residents and three youth workers) and one focus group with six young people aged between 12 and 16. Input from **young people** was unfortunately limited due to the need for the young people to complete consent forms and for a parent or guardian to also complete an assent form. This ruled out the use of street intercept methods (Miller et al, 1997) which would have led to a larger sample. Instead, access was sought through organisations and a local youth worker was identified who was able to arrange a focus group.

The focus group of local young people was undertaken with six participants as larger groups may tend to inhibit young peoples' responsiveness (Hopkins, 2007). The work of Gibson (2007) provides some guidance regarding the use of focus groups with young people and

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3 draws attention to a number of issues including the role of the moderator, introducing the  
4 group and conducting the discussion. This work was helpful in terms of influencing how the  
5 focus group was approached. The moderator was very conscious of the age gap between  
6 himself and the members of the focus group and aimed to be more participant-focused than  
7 he would with a focus group comprised of adults. When introducing the session, the  
8 moderator took time to very clearly explain the purpose of the focus group, the types of  
9 questions that would be asked and also outlined basic ground rules for the discussion. During  
10 the discussion, attempts were made to elicit responses from every member of the group  
11 without explicitly focussing on particular individuals.  
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25 The semi-structured interviews conducted with adult interviewees were based upon a set of  
26 standardised questions relating to stakeholder perceptions of the dispersal area and its  
27 effectiveness. Respondents were identified through snowball sampling (Martin, 2000)  
28 facilitated by the local Community Safety Unit. The choice of interview method allowed  
29 freedom for unanticipated themes to emerge throughout the interview. Following  
30 transcription of the interview data, a thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) was  
31 undertaken. The framework underpinning the analysis was essentially constructivist and  
32 Guba and Lincoln (1994) highlight the challenges of accurately assessing the  
33 'Transferability' of findings generated under such conceptual frameworks, especially given  
34 the limited sample of young people. In particular, they insist that researchers need to exercise  
35 full transparency in providing sufficient contextual information to enable others to make  
36 informed judgements about how best to apply such methods and data elsewhere. This view  
37 coincides with the views of Malterud (2001) who notes that the analysis of qualitative forms  
38 of data demands appropriate judgements about such materials to be made. Furthermore, she  
39 suggests that high quality qualitative research should not overstate the material which it  
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3 draws upon and this was used as a guiding principle in the treatment of the data in the present  
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5 research.  
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## 8 9 **Overview of Findings**

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14 The thematic analysis of the interview data allowed for the identification of a number of  
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16 themes (rationale, appropriateness, impact on young people and impact on crime/anti-social  
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18 behaviour) and these are presented below.  
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### 20 21 22 *Rationale*

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27 Congregating youths, rather than anti-social behaviour, appear to have been perceived by  
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29 over half of the interviewees as the prime driver behind the introduction of the Dispersal  
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31 Order. One young person suggested that;  
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36 ‘...when people see a large group of young people they immediately think there’s going to be  
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38 trouble and that’s normally not the case. They’re just out as a group socializing’ (Young  
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40 Person 4)  
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45 This sentiment appeared to be reinforced by the views of a police officer. She said;  
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50 ‘It’s a horrible problem...A lot of them aren’t what you’d class as a bad kid, they’re from  
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52 good homes, they’re from good schools, they’ve not got any other problems but they like to  
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54 go there... You have literally got a group of a hundred kids that meet because they feel happy  
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56 there’ (Police Officer 1)  
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5 A similar opinion was voiced by a PCSO who asked;  
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10 ‘...If they are hanging around because they are children and they speak the same language or  
11 they are like-minded people...why should we be dispersing them?’ (PCSO 3)  
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16 Other local dynamics did emerge through the findings. One police officer, for example,  
17 described the introduction of dispersal powers as ‘political’ and as being something that was  
18 perceived as an ‘appropriate’ form of intervention by local councillors, without councillors  
19 really considering whether there was a rational justification for it. One councillor,  
20 correspondingly, drew attention to the symbolic value of the powers by suggesting;  
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30 “The chief advantage I suspect is that the people who use the town and who are living near  
31 the town see the authorities at least attempting to do something...the idea that they have the  
32 power to disperse groups of young people who older people...there’s a lot of older people in  
33 Southtown...find intimidating’ (Councillor 1)  
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40 The demographics of Southtown, and their impact on local political agendas, were referred to  
41 by one youth worker who stated that;  
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47 ‘In Southtown we have a very conservative ageing population who like to use the authority  
48 of the police and the local council’ (Youth Worker 3)  
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54 Of note here is the opinion of one resident who suggested that the Dispersal Order had  
55 empowered police officers to deal with the congregating young people. They said;  
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5 “I think it was good for the police because when they came they had a leg to stand on...to say,  
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7 you’re not allowed to be here” (Resident 1)  
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11 Overall, however, the introduction of the intervention was only seen as having an appropriate  
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13 rationale by members of the councillor and resident stakeholder groups.  
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18 *Appropriateness*  
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22 One youth worker, one PCSO and one police officer suggested that Dispersal Orders can be  
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24 used advantageously when implemented as a strategic response to a well-defined issue.  
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26 However, in terms of the Southtown Dispersal Order the three felt that the implementation of  
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28 the order represented an inappropriate use of the powers. For example;  
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34 ‘I can’t seriously see how it’s improved the safety of young people in Southtown. I don’t see  
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36 it as a benefit at all to the young people’ (Youth Worker 2)  
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40 Likewise;  
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45 ‘Every one [dispersal area] we have done down here has been directed at youth and I think it  
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47 actually gives youth a bad name and I think you’re criminalizing youth to be perfectly  
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49 honest’ (PCSO 1)  
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52 Similarly;  
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3 'They do feel safer in groups and you wouldn't advise someone to walk across a park at night  
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5 on their own' (Police Officer 2)  
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10 Although concerns were expressed by a majority of members of the public regarding  
11 congregating youths, a minority voiced disquiet at the use of dispersal areas for dealing with  
12 such behaviour. Likewise, the views of the two councillors interviewed differed significantly  
13 with one being very supportive of the intervention whilst the other was opposed. Overall,  
14 councillors and residents appeared more likely to view the dispersal powers as a positive  
15 intervention.  
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### 24 25 *Impact on Young People* 26

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29 Eight of the fifteen adults interviewed (inclusive of all adult stakeholder groups) explicitly  
30 referred to the potential for the Dispersal Order to be used unfairly on young people. Young  
31 people themselves also tended to draw attention to the negative impact of the powers. For  
32 example; For  
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41 '...I felt quite targeted because we weren't doing anything, we were literally standing there  
42 talking to our friends. It was like we were targeted as 'criminals' for just standing there'  
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45 (Young Person 1)  
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50 A central theme in the accounts of young people was the suggestion that young people may  
51 congregate in groups due to feelings of vulnerability. For example;  
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3 'I think young people feel safer in larger groups of people...it's like safety in numbers and  
4 being dispersed kind of destroys that' (Young Person 4)  
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10 This issue of vulnerability also emerges as a determining factor in where young people  
11 congregate and was addressed by a police officer who said;  
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16 'Southtown...youths there say 'we come here because we feel safe. If we go to Easttown or  
17 we go to Northtown we'll get our heads kicked in'...so they also congregate there because  
18 they feel safe' (Police Officer 1)  
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25 A similar dynamic was identified by one young person who said;  
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30 'We go to the seafront because there's loads of lights, my house is up the road so if anything  
31 happens I can run home and if anything happens as well, because it's local...it's the base of  
32 everything...we know what to do if something does happen. It's a lot more safe because you  
33 can see what's going on, there's always PCSOs walking up and down...' (Young Person 1)  
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41 Importantly, some of the young people who took part in the research suggested that the  
42 experience of being dispersed could lead to increased vulnerability. One young person  
43 recalled that;  
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49 'It was annoying because we were waiting outside Tesco to try and get away from people  
50 who were trying hurt our friend and the police were telling us to go back to that place'  
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54 (Young Person 2)  
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3 Another young person referred specifically to gender and vulnerability. For example;  
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7 'I think it makes it more dangerous because you're separated from people...For people like  
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9 us...vulnerable young girls...if you get separated into two's it makes it a bit more dangerous  
10  
11 for us' (Young Person 1)  
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16 Whilst young people drew attention to the ways in which the act of being dispersed could  
17  
18 place them at further potential risk, for the majority of the members of the public who were  
19  
20 interviewed for this research the safety of young people was not raised as a substantive issue.  
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### 23 24 25 *Impact on Crime/Anti-Social Behaviour* 26 27

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29 Data from the interviews suggest that over half of the respondents felt that either the  
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31 Dispersal Order had led to no increase in the level of public safety or that they were 'unsure'  
32  
33 of its effectiveness. The statistical analysis of the impact of the dispersal area on recorded  
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35 crime and anti-social behaviour appeared to show little overall benefit, in terms of crime  
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37 reduction, when adopting a quantitative decline in recorded crime or anti-social behaviour as  
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39 evidence of effectiveness. Any reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour in the relevant  
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41 areas during the period of the Dispersal Order, were largely cancelled out by increases in  
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43 neighbouring wards where dispersal powers were not being used, suggesting that  
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45 displacement may have occurred during the period that the dispersal powers were being  
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47 used.  
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### 51 52 53 54 **Discussion** 55 56 57 58 59 60

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3 The research findings appear to support those of Crawford and Lister (2007) despite the  
4 research taking place in quite dissimilar environments. Their work focused largely on use of  
5 dispersal powers in response to specific crime and anti-social behaviour issues. In contrast,  
6 Southtown was an altogether different setting for a Dispersal Order being a small coastal  
7 town with an economy largely based upon tourism and an above average retired population.  
8 Similarly, it had no history of substantial crime or anti-social behaviour problems. The Index  
9 of Multiple Deprivation shows that the wards that made up the district under investigation  
10 were low-ranking for general, child and pensioner deprivation. The distinction is an important  
11 one as it may suggest that, for Southtown, factors other than crime and disorder may have a  
12 part to play in decision-making surrounding the introduction of Dispersal Orders. Indeed, the  
13 work of Agarwal and Blunt (2006) amply illustrates the ways in which social exclusion may  
14 take different forms within coastal communities than those experienced in other **types** of  
15 community. The data in the present research appears to indicate a polarised demographic  
16 profile to the town where there is a noticeable skewing towards the young and the old as  
17 proportionately large local populations that engage in limited interaction with each other.  
18 This feature was highlighted by both youth workers and police officers and may provide a  
19 partial explanation for the identification of congregating, rather than anti-social, youth as a  
20 problem.  
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45 At the same time, young people's accounts of being dispersed suggest that not only can being  
46 dispersed increase perceptions of vulnerability but also pose risks to actual safety. This issue  
47 of vulnerability features in the accounts of many of the stakeholders. Through the present  
48 research, a picture emerges that appears to strongly support the idea of youth 'localism',  
49 proposed by **Watt** and Stenson (1998), whereby young people cultivate feelings of affinity for  
50 particular locations and that these are intrinsically bound up with personal perceptions of  
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3 safety and vulnerability. Likewise, Crawford and Lister (2007) note that the Dispersal Order  
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5 effectively silences and removes young people from public sight, a process that may serve  
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7 those individuals poorly as they emerge into adulthood. Furthermore, if Raffo and Reeves  
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9 (2000) are correct in their assertion that youths congregate, partially, as a collective means of  
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11 problem-solving externally-imposed challenges, then attempts to exclude groups of youths  
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13 from public space may serve to further inhibit opportunities to develop social capital.  
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18 What is also of potential interest is the extent of variation in the views of the police and some  
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20 of the councillors/local residents. Whilst any attempt to explain such variations will be purely  
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22 speculative, it may be helpful to note that an acknowledgement and understanding of child  
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24 protection and vulnerability have become increasingly important elements of the police role  
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26 over recent years. Indeed, policing has witnessed a significant broadening of both its role and  
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28 the demographic from which it draws its officers over recent years (Cockcroft, 2013) and this  
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30 may play some part in explaining divergences between police and popular opinion. Police  
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32 officers, therefore, may increasingly be aware of the 'significant tension' (Crawford and  
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34 Lister, 2007, p. 69) between the anti-social behaviour agenda and the responsibilities laid out  
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36 under *Every Child Matters* and the Children Act (2004). These have led to a situation where  
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38 child protection, as a concept, is essentially in conflict with, and undermined by, the apparent  
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40 arbitrariness of the Dispersal Order (Stone, 2005). Similarly, the findings suggest that the  
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42 members of police staff and PCSOs were largely unsympathetic, like youth workers, to  
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44 'deficit model' views of local young people. Again it might be possible to speculate that this  
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46 was due to factors such as resentment at what might be seen as political interference in local  
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48 policing issues by local authority pressure to use dispersal powers. What is also not clear is  
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50 the real source of the apparent demonisation of young people in the locality. Agarwal and  
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52 Blunt's (2006) work suggests that the polarization of the local young and elderly  
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3 communities might be a factor whereas Young's work (2009) on moral panics, conversely,  
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5 suggests that these tensions emerge as a result of police action and media reporting. It appears  
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7 to be the case that the police, in this locality at least, were reluctant to engage in actions that  
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9 might encourage such negative depictions to arise. The role of local media did not emerge  
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11 through the data.  
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## 14 15 16 **Conclusion**

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20 Whilst the Dispersal Order is not explicitly articulated as a youth measure, Crawford and  
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22 Lister (2007) note the concern of young people in their research that the anti-social behaviour  
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24 of adults generally fails to attract dispersal interventions. The present research appears to  
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26 support this assertion with the majority of respondents perceiving congregating youth rather  
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28 than anti-social behaviour as the driver behind the introduction of Dispersal Orders. This  
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30 binary between youth and adults can be developed, as the work of Millie (2008) and  
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32 Jamieson (2012) does, to show how the exclusionary properties of the anti-social behaviour  
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34 agenda highlight a weakening of the distinction between attempts at urban regeneration and  
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36 the control of marginalized groups. This concept is extended further towards the concept of  
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38 territorial and spatial control by the work of Kennelly and Watt (2013) who highlight this  
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40 area of ambiguity in respect of dispersal powers. Similarly, Garrett (2015) notes allied  
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42 concerns surrounding the extension of those powers found in the new PSPOs. At a practical  
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44 level, once again, one must highlight the potential of such interventions to communicate  
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46 symbolically about young people in terms that reinforce deficit models of their behaviour.  
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48 We should also remain aware of the potential negative impact of these powers on  
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50 opportunities to develop social capital, not least in areas where social exclusion takes on  
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3 particular nuances such as in coastal communities which may be characterised by more  
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5 pronounced inter-generational tensions.  
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10 This development of control over social spaces appears to support the views of Jamieson  
11 (2012) who anticipated a continuation and intensification of such exclusionary processes in  
12 the post-2010 political landscape. Indeed, the introduction of the PSPO, can be perceived as  
13 supporting Jamieson's perception that we are witnessing the further criminalization of social  
14 policy, at least in terms of dispersal powers. The broadening of the definition of anti-social  
15 behaviour, the focus on individuals as well as groups and the three year authorisation period  
16 all present a clear indication of the direction of travel, in a policy sense, of the state's thinking  
17 in terms of the social control of public space. At the same time, it will be interesting to  
18 ascertain the extent to which local social, demographic and political contexts influence  
19 decision-making processes surrounding authorisation of PSPOs. In particular, attention will  
20 need to be paid to the potential for the police to become co-opted into politicised responses to  
21 local community issues. The current research appears to suggest that this might be  
22 problematic given the failure of the police to express support for 'deficit' models of youth.  
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40 Further, the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act (2014) may be seen as a further  
41 embedding of the use of legislation as a 'substantive moral aspiration' rather than a 'morally  
42 neutral instrument', a distinction identified by Simmonds (2005, p. 91). This ongoing  
43 amalgamation of morality and legislation appears as a rational response to anti-social  
44 behaviour in a society where anti-social behaviour has become a 'virtual metaphor' (Squires,  
45 2006, p. 151) for the behaviour of young people. Both the Dispersal Order and the PSPO  
46 (from what limited information that we currently have in terms of the latter) can be seen as a  
47 means of communicating symbolic messages based around the problematic status of youth  
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3 through their ability to reinforce ‘deficit’ models of youth behaviour. Simultaneously, they  
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5 provide adult populations with the opportunity to seize physical and metaphoric control of  
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7 what have essentially become the contested public territories of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.  
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For Peer Review