

Police push for 'instant justice'

Police are considering asking ministers for more powers to impose "instant justice" for anti-social activities.

The public wants anti-social behaviour dealt with "swiftly"

The Association of Chief Police Officers (Acpo) may push for more powers to penalise people without a court appearance.

It has heard plans from one police chief for powers to ban teens from city centres and gangs from meeting up.

Civil rights group Liberty said plans were "a recipe for arbitrary justice, perceived injustice, real injustice".

"When you do decide that someone's been so criminal and behaved so badly and harmed other people that you need to punish them, that really is something that in a democracy belongs with the courts," director Shami Chakrabati told BBC News.

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Acpo said it may formally submit proposals to ministers in the new year.

Surrey's assistant chief constable, Mark Rowley, has proposed the measures to help modernise the way the police work.

According to the Guardian, the proposals include:

- The power for police to deal with "town centre yobs" by excluding them for an "appropriate period" while they are given an informal warning or made to pay a fixed-penalty fine
- Powers for a "neighbourhood constable" - armed with local knowledge - with the right to hand out a three-month ban on gang members causing disorder on estate from associating in public
- The ability for police to seize and crush cars driven by those repeatedly driving without registration or insurance, no driving licence or MOT. Instant driving bans could also be imposed ahead of a court appearance
- Knife crime could be targeted by giving police the ability to stop and search based on "reasonable suspicion" from previous convictions

Mr Rowley said extra spending on dedicated neighbourhood police was raising hopes within communities that anti-social activity would be dealt with quickly.

"It is therefore time to debate whether constables should be given substantial additional, discretionary, summary powers to meet these challenges... such powers would effectively bring existing criminal justice system powers to the street."

In 2004, on-the-spot fines were introduced for low level offences such as shoplifting, underage drinking, vandalism and littering. People who are drunk and disorderly may also get a fine.

The prime minister has recently called for a "profound rebalancing" of the justice system in favour of crime victims.