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"Baby ASBOs" for children as young as 10

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By Andrew Hough

LONDON (Reuters) - Troubled teenagers and children as young as 10 would be hit with anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) under a government plan unveiled on Tuesday to fight youth crime.

About 1,000 of the country's "most challenging" children will be forced to sign good behaviour contracts under the 218-million pound programme, Children's Secretary Ed Balls said.

Under the expansion of the Family Intervention Projects, the troublemakers would be supported by "non-negotiable" workers.

But failure to abide by the contract will lead to a criminal record, and a behaviour order dubbed a "baby ASBO".

"The support is non-negotiable -- if young people don't take the help, or refuse to mend their ways they will face the consequences," Balls said in a statement.

"For example (they will face) an Anti-Social Behaviour Order to stop bad behaviour and an Individual Support Order to compel them to co-operate with support. These are court orders with criminal records and sanctions for those who breach them."

Earlier in a radio interview, Children's Minister Beverley Hughes defended the scheme and denied suggestions that earlier attempts to tackle youth crime had failed.

"This is not an old idea in the sense we know this has been working with dysfunctional families who have been creating havoc in communities with anti-social behaviour," she told the BBC.

"This is applying that approach that has shown to be effective to the young people themselves, but at an age before they are really getting into 'hard end' activities...(or) when they have been drawn into gang behaviour."

A range of community campaigners, quoted in statements released by Balls, welcomed the plans.

But the Conservatives said the government was "deluded."

"It is further evidence of their failure to face up to the reality of broken families, broken communities and a fractured country," said shadow Home Affairs minister, James Brokenshire, in a statement.

"If they think that parachuting in short-term help for a thousand troubled kids is the answer to the problems on Britain's streets they are deluding themselves."

The announcement comes just days after a senior Scotland Yard officer called for a national child DNA database to help combat youth crime.

The Met's Forensic Science Director, Gary Pugh, said in The Observer newspaper that the DNA of badly behaved children as young as five should be put on such a database.

(Editing by Stephen Addison)

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