

CABINET

13 October 2004

NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDENS – FOLLOW UP REPORT

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

Contact Officer: Steve Tilbury Tel No: 01962 848292

RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB859 – Neighbourhood Wardens Scheme, Operational Arrangements - 20 April 2004

WTF37 - Neighbourhood Wardens Scheme, Progress Report – 14 September 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The report provides Cabinet with an update on the implementation of the Neighbourhood Wardens Scheme. It highlights the outcome of consultation in the communities concerned, with the Police, the Community Safety Partnership and with TACT.

It seeks approval for the provision of additional funding for the scheme as a result of higher than expected salary costs for the warden posts.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Notes the feedback received from consultation conducted; and
2. Approves an additional base budget contribution to the scheme of £16,000, in advance of consideration of the budget, so that a third warden can be appointed as planned, that cost divided equally between the General Fund, Winchester Town Account and Housing Revenue Account.

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DETAIL:

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The City Council has agreed to the implementation of a new 'Neighbourhood Warden' scheme in the current financial year. The scheme is designed to improve the speed and efficiency with which the Council and other agencies deal with issues which affect quality of life such as anti-social behaviour, maintenance of public spaces and community involvement. The wardens will operate in the Highcliffe and Stanmore areas of Winchester where there is a high percentage of City Council managed housing.
- 1.2 A broad definition of the scheme, its aims and the budget requirements were agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 20 April 2004. Officers were requested to provide a further report to Cabinet in October to provide further detail for Cabinet approval, particularly in the light of consultation with the communities which would be served by the wardens.
- 1.3 A similar report was made to the Town Forum on the 14 September 2004.
- 1.4 To remind Members, the scheme proposed consists of three wardens and a management post which will also have responsibility for a range of issues relating to anti-social behaviour and the Council's new powers and responsibilities under recent legislation. The establishment of these posts has been agreed by the Personnel Committee.

2. Consultation

- 2.1 In the last few weeks discussions about the wardens scheme have been held with the Police, Hampshire County Council, TACT, the Community Safety Partnership, the Highcliffe Community Action Group and the Highcliffe Tenants Association. It was also discussed at the last meeting of the Stanmore Steering Group. In each case the Council's aims and objectives for wardens have been explained and a number of questions raised and answered. The general response to the Council's proposals has been very supportive. The initiative is seen as a positive, practical response to the problems previously identified. There is a consensus that the emphasis on managing the local environment, working with community groups and providing 'eyes and ears' in the community to reduce anti-social behaviour is the appropriate response to community needs, rather than a more enforcement orientated approach.
- 2.2 Particular issues raised at these meetings have included:
 - the need to ensure good liaison with existing housing management functions and not to duplicate services.
 - the importance of wardens providing regular feedback to community representatives on issues and ideas and to listen to community concerns.

- the importance of wardens being able to act quickly and practically to deal with problems themselves and not simply to report everything back to someone else.
- good communication with the police so that information to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour can be shared.
- the wardens should be a visible presence in the community with a large network of contacts.

All of these are issues which are being addressed as part of the implementation process.

- 2.3 In order to inform the wider community a leaflet was produced in August and delivered to every household in Stanmore and Highcliffe. As well as general information, the leaflet promoted two public open evenings offering the chance to find out more about the Council's plans. These were held on 6 and 8 September at local venues. Between 20 and 30 people attended each event and were able to talk to officers, local Members and watch a video about wardens scheme produced by the Home Office. All of those attending were positive about the proposals.

3. Staffing and Development

- 3.1 As agreed by Cabinet the wardens will be managed by the new post of Neighbourhood Services Co-ordinator (NSC) which has been established at Scale 5. Interviews for this position were held recently and an appointment has been made, to start at the end of October.
- 3.2 On arrival the NSC will have the task of drawing together the operational aspects of the warden service – communication, training, health and safety etc. They will prepare an operating handbook and agree protocols for services delivery with colleagues in housing, the Police, Highways and Community Services.
- 3.3 One matter which requires a specific decision by Cabinet is that of funding for the proposed three wardens. Initial costings (based on schemes elsewhere) were based on wardens being paid at Scale 3, but job evaluation has placed them at Scale 4. In a full year this means an additional cost of £16,000 for which no funding is currently available. The higher grade will enable the Council to offer more competitive salaries and therefore to attract a better field of candidates. It will also aid retention. However, if no additional funding is available it will only be possible to recruit two wardens and this will have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the scheme.
- 3.4 Current funding for the wardens has been split between the Housing Revenue Account, General Fund and the Winchester Town Account. It is for Cabinet to decide if additional funding is to be made available in the base budget and to determine how this is made up. However, by convention the Town Forum is consulted regarding the use of the Town Account, and this was done at its last meeting. The Town Forum supported the principle of retaining the 'three way' split of funding established in last year's budget between the Town Account, General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). It should be noted that additional funding will not be required in the current financial year.

- 3.5 TACT has been consulted on the allocation of additional funding from the HRA and has responded as follows:

Once again concern is raised at the lack of time to present to TACT, so that the view of tenants can be heard as a body. Therefore once again these comments are from the TACT Chairmen only. There seems to be an ongoing increase in costs which is of extreme concern and it is hoped that this will be the last.

However, the TACT Chairmen agree that the increase of £16,000 be accepted and split, as mentioned in the paper, between the Housing Revenue Account, the General Fund and the Winchester Town Account.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The shape of the wardens scheme has now been well defined and has been consulted on in the community. The Council's proposals have been well received and seem to be generally supported. Work on implementing the scheme is on target with a view to having one or more wardens in post by the end of the calendar year. The full scheme should be operating early in the new year.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

5. CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO)

- 5.1 The introduction of the neighbourhood wardens scheme is a specific objective of the Council in 2003/4 as set out in the Performance Plan and Corporate Strategy.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The report identifies a requirement for an additional £16,000 to meet the full year operating costs of the scheme.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES:

None