

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

9 October 2008

NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDENS – UPDATE REPORT

REPORT OF HEAD OF ENVIRONMENT

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB 1157 – Neighbourhood wardens Scheme – Evaluation – 18 January 2006

WTF80 - Neighbourhood Warden Scheme First Year Evaluation – 22 November 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report provides the Forum with an update on recent developments in relation to the Neighbourhood Warden scheme following its transfer to the Environment Division.

The improvements have been made in order to free up additional capacity within the team and to improve outcomes for the community and are part of an ongoing process to increase their effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Town Forum

1. Notes the progress and improvements to the Neighbourhood Warden Scheme since its last review in November 2006.
2. Suggests items for inclusion in the proposed service plan being developed for the team.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Neighbourhood Warden Service was launched on 24 February 2005 in Highcliffe and since then Town Forum has received a number of reports regarding their work. The reports have confirmed the success of the scheme, which has been delivering projects and work as well as working with the main communities within the Winchester area.
- 1.2 The emphasis of the warden scheme in Winchester has always been on practical environmental work, problem solving in the public realm and public reassurance. This is entirely in accord with a number of key national and local priorities such as the drive to create cleaner, safer and greener communities, and to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- 1.3 As part of a structural reorganisation in April 2007, the Neighbourhood Warden Team transferred to the Environment Division and are now located within their Environment Team. The relocation of the staff within this team has provided an opportunity to review working methods and priorities in order to consider ways in which the team can achieve the best possible outcomes.
- 1.4 The aim of this work has been to build upon the successes to date and improve the outcomes for those communities served by the wardens as well as other areas within the district where possible. The team currently has 5 members of staff with a supervisor and 4 wardens following recent recruitment of 3 new members to the team. The existing work priorities are shown at appendix 1 which will continue as the improvements shown below progress.
- 1.5 Town Forum makes a contribution of £45,000 towards the cost of this service, the remaining budget coming from the HRA and General Fund. It is therefore important to ensure that it is possible to demonstrate value for money to those accountable for this expenditure.

2. Recent progress with the scheme

- 2.1 There have been a number of significant local and national developments which have impacted upon the way the Neighbourhood Warden scheme operates which need to be taken into account when considering the way forward for the scheme.
- 2.2 The establishment and consolidation of the County Council's Accredited Community Support Officers (ACSOs) and the Police Services' Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) work closely with the Neighbourhood

Warden service and Community Safety staff, so there is a need to ensure that duplication or unnecessary overlap is avoided.

- 2.3 Further progress with the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act which provides an improved legal framework with which to deal with the 'Envirocrime' agenda which is acknowledged as a community priority from previous surveys and feedback.
- 2.4 The development of mobile working solutions using IT to allow recording of incidents, faster processing of solutions and improved performance management data for managers.
- 2.5 In addition to these developments it has been possible to review current working methods to consider whether these are still appropriate and achieving the best possible outcomes. One such issue is the previous reliance on routine patrols based on the avoidance of lone working. Whilst this was considered necessary at the time, the current view is that routine working in pairs is no longer required unless the circumstances demand this approach. Neighbourhood wardens operate in a way similar to other 'patrol' staff such as dog wardens and lone working has been accepted for these staff for sometime.
- 2.6 The avoidance of the reliance on team patrols has freed up significant capacity within the team. This development, linked to a review of working patterns, has enabled the expansion of the scheme into Weeke, where it has been welcomed by the Community and local Members. It has already been involved in resolving community issues such as difficulties with waste collection arrangements and anti social behaviour. A review of the Neighbourhood Warden vehicle fleet has also enabled the lease of an additional vehicle to improve flexibility of staff in dealing with issues.

3. Future Developments

- 3.1 Whilst significant progress has been made to date, there are still additional improvements to be made which will further improve the outcomes for residents.
- 3.2 Insofar as the 'envirocrime' agenda is concerned wardens thus far have focused on the provision of a prompt removal service for issues such as fly tipping, fly posting and graffiti. Whilst this has proved successful, the problem persists as there is no disincentive to deter the perpetrators as no attempt is currently made to identify them. Residents are therefore effectively meeting the costs of a small minority of anti social behaviour which spoils the visual amenity of the area for the majority and encourages further problems. It is therefore proposed to use the wardens to identify offenders in known hotspots as a means of deterring such actions. This type of approach is often used for other warden schemes although it is accepted that it should be handled carefully to avoid confusion within the community about the warden's role.
- 3.3 This switch of emphasis for some incidents may cause concern amongst some that the warden's role has changed significantly from advocate to enforcer. However, when such proposals were discussed with TACT in June

of this year there was general acceptance of both the afternoon and evening groups that something should be done to try and deal with problems before they occur, rather than just offering a very efficient clean up service. The view is that the majority of residents want to see an approach which prevents a few spoiling what could be a pleasant environment in which to live.

- 3.4 It must be emphasised that this approach will only be use to deal with hotspots and it is not proposed to switch to a routine enforcement based approach. Enforcement will only be used where appropriate and there will not be a focus on Fixed Penalty Notices for the sake of it. Wardens will also continue to work with the community to identify the priority areas which cause concern. In that way the end result will be improved outcomes for the community concerned. Wardens should then be seen not only as an advocate but also a team dealing with practical problems on the ground. The emphasis will be on outcomes not just activity.
- 3.5 It is proposed to continue discussions with local community groups about how this new approach can work best and the new Neighbourhood Warden Supervisor will continue to attend group meetings to discuss emerging priorities and how the Wardens can help prevent problems occurring. This work will build upon the existing process of estate walkabouts which will continue.
- 3.6 The opportunity to build and develop the scheme in other areas of the district remains an option for the future, but is heavily dependent on management and operational considerations, team capacity and the identification of additional resources. It is unlikely that this will be possible for sometime unless additional resources can be freed up to allow this to take place.
- 3.7 With the re-establishment of a full complement of staff within the team, it is now possible to begin work on a detailed service plan for the service and once completed Town Forum will be consulted on its content. The aim is to produce a clear action plan for the team which will be a balance between the existing priorities and further improvements as described within this report.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 It is important that the Neighbourhood Warden Service keeps abreast of both national and local developments/priorities if it is to demonstrate effectiveness in terms of outcomes. At a time when the availability of resources is very limited any opportunity to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the team needs to be taken.
- 4.2 There is a danger that performance management for the service relies solely on activity and visibility but with little improvement on the ground. Solely dealing with problems 'after the event' is an inefficient methodology and efforts need to be made to 'get ahead of the problem' before it occurs. The community want to see such problems addressed and it is inequitable that they continue to fund a service which deals with the anti-social activities of a few.

- 4.3 The changes implemented so far have helped to free up additional capacity within the team and future proposals will help to improve their effectiveness further. The staff involved appreciate the need to proceed with sensitivity to ensure that the wardens remain embedded within the community, but it is considered that this is possible with good communication.
- 4.4 The Neighbourhood Warden Team have recently undergone a period of significant change with 3 of the 5 members leaving to take up new posts. This level of staff turnover is not a new phenomenon but the service has been fortunate to recruit a new supervisor with considerable experience of another Neighbourhood Warden scheme the opportunity to build on the improvements to date is significant.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

5 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

5.1 The City Council's Corporate Priorities include

- a **High Quality Environment** for everyone
- **Communities** that feel **Safe and Strong** across the district

5.2 A key aim supporting these priorities is

Ensure that streets and open spaces are clean, attractive and accessible

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

6.1 There are no resource implications within this report but Forum are asked to note the improved working arrangements which will improve the outcomes within the existing resources provided.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Existing Neighbourhood Warden priorities.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN EXISTING PRIORITY AREAS

PRIORITY 1 - Supporting a safer community

<u>Role</u>	<u>Methodology</u>
Providing valuable information to the Police/Fire Service	Strong close working relationship with both the Fire Service and the Police. Wardens currently attend weekly Police briefings with Community safety Officer.
Crime Reduction and Environment Weeks (CREW)	Work with other agencies to address crime reduction and environmental concerns within an area over a specific period of time.
Community Safety	Running of the Junior Citizen Scheme in partnership with other statutory agencies
Fire Safety	Partnership working with Fire Service to deal with high arson risk properties.

PRIORITY 2 - Targeting Anti Social Behaviour

<u>Role</u>	<u>Methodology</u>
Resolving 'Hotspot' Problem areas	Close liaison with Police, Housing, Youth service and various other agencies, to identify 'hotspot' anti social behaviour areas and provide a high visibility presence in places where this is a problem.

PRIORITY 3 - Helping to maintain a clean and tidy environment

<u>Role</u>	<u>Methodology</u>
Abandoned vehicles / untaxed vehicles	Early identification of problem vehicles and assistance with the procedure to ensure removal.
Fly tip / graffiti	Removal of fly tipped material and graffiti. Assessment of incidents of vandalism and removal of over 40 dumped trolleys
Discarded Needles	Collection and logging of discarded needles and safe disposal. Attendance at Young Persons Drug and Alcohol Reference Group and the Adults Drug and Alcohol Reference Group for Winchester to provide regular updates on needle finds. Liaison with the Police on likely 'drug dens'.
Street cleanliness	Work with community groups to assist with street cleanliness including liaison with contractors where practical difficulties such as parked cars exist.

PRIORITY 4 - Helping to build a stronger, more confident community

<u>Role</u>	<u>Methodology</u>
Community Liaison	Attendance at community group meetings to gauge opinions on issues and identify priorities. Estate Walkabouts to identify priorities.
Community development	Working with community groups to develop and support recreational activity, supporting local schools and other relevant agencies to implement community projects as appropriate
Signposting	providing residents with information on other agencies/services