

# NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN SCHEME

## Checked against delivery

1. To my mind, neighbourhood wardens sum up what it means to build safer and stronger communities. And that goes a long way towards making them sustainable. They can make neighbourhoods places where people want to live and enjoy living.

2. Neighbourhood wardens have been a great success story so far. They are popular with residents, with local agencies and partners, and with elected members. In fact, a quarter of residents are more content with their neighbourhoods when there are wardens. Independent evaluation found that there was a 28 per cent reduction in crime and 10 per cent reduction in the fear of street robberies in areas with wardens.

3. As many of you know a quarter of our pilot programme was led by Housing Associations. Well over 80 per cent of the pilot schemes have carried on, and expanded, since pilot funding ended. That is a clear indication of how much they are valued.

4. Those are some of the facts and figures. Of course warden schemes are much more than that. Many wardens are using their knowledge and understanding of their patch to improve their communities in other ways. They are keeping people informed, getting people involved in community activities and generally acting as the catalyst for residents to help change their neighbourhood. They are dealing with small problems and larger problems on the street. They are bringing people together and helping very vulnerable groups.

5. There are lots of examples of good practice emerging. You will be seeing some of these later and I hope you will take the opportunity of talking to colleagues from Southwark, Camden and Thamesmead for example, about what is going on in their neighbourhoods.

6. At the end of March the pilot warden programmes come to an end. The benefits are clear and I believe we must spread this approach. The Government will still support wardens through the neighbourhood part of the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund within Local Area Agreements. The other way we will provide support is through regional warden resource centres.

7. There are three in London at the moment – in Camden, Southwark and Merton – and one just outside in Thurrock covering the Thames Gateway area. They can help design and manage warden services, set up sharing

arrangements, organise study visits – you'll be hearing more about those later, give funding advice and so on.

8. An important part of their work is providing training for wardens and warden managers. This comes in a variety of forms including a range of free support materials and the assessment and verification of NVQ level 2 for wardens.

9. In many areas the problem is not winning people like you over to the idea of wardens, it is in recruiting people to be wardens. Southwark I know is having difficulty recruiting fast enough.

10. Perhaps one solution is to look at attracting young people into the job. Tameside in the North West region, for example, is running an apprenticeship scheme. Young people are given an opportunity to experience various different jobs around the council and within local partners, including as wardens. They receive an apprentice wage during their two-year training. Whatever direction they chose to go in, they know more about all the other jobs that are done by many people with years of experience in one area.

11. Modern apprenticeships are another way of opening the door to local young people who might think of becoming a warden. We are hoping to pilot these in the near future. For even younger people there are examples around the country of junior warden schemes. Some have been on 'grumble walks', finding out what is really bothering or worrying people locally, and doing what they can to help. This encourages good junior citizenship and is the kind of involvement and engagement that is vital for the long-term health of our communities.

12. It makes sense too when you consider that in neighbourhood renewal areas there tend to be more people aged under 24 than in the population as a whole. Around 40 per cent are in this age group.

13. As well as 'thinking wardens' at the early stages of career choices, we also need to persuade people to 'think wardens' at the early stages of major developments. Here in London we have several but around the Thames Gateway and the plans for the Olympics there are some great opportunities to factor in wardens near the beginning. In the five Olympic boroughs there are already 70 wardens.

14. The wardens are in a good position to keep local communities up to date with what is happening, to encourage young people to help build the Olympic legacy and to keep an eye on half-built and empty buildings. When the building is finished or the Olympic village is converted to housing, for example, the wardens are already in place and familiar with the locality. This is, and will be, a real plus both for people coming to the area as well as for developers and landlords with property there.

15. We recognise and indeed applaud the role social landlords play in preventing and tackling anti-social behaviour. Many are working closely with warden schemes and some are already sponsoring schemes. A recent survey for the Housing Corporation by MORI showed that nearly three-quarters [74 per cent] felt that wardens were the best response to anti-social behaviour.

16. We are introducing a new Respect Standard for housing management. We will develop this with the sector. It will establish a benchmark of effective performance in tackling anti-social behaviour quickly and effectively. This is the assurance every tenant wants. We will encourage landlords to sign up and we see wardens playing an important role in supporting this standard. They can do this not only by enforcing measures to stop antisocial behaviour – and they can do that. But also by making the links between people of different ages and of different backgrounds. This is where mutual respect begins to take root.

17. Wardens have other advantages to offer social landlords. They can take care of tenants and the housing stock by reducing damage, removing graffiti and reporting what needs to be done quickly. This can result in efficiency savings for Housing Associations.

18. Wardens are a win:win:win all round. They are really making a difference and improving the quality of places and people's lives. They are building confidence, building relationships and building a future for our communities.

**Speech by Jim Fitzpatrick on 13 February 2006**