

Report to Environmental and Planning Services Scrutiny Standing Panel



SCRUTINY



Date of meeting: 13 April 2006

Subject: Neighbourhood/Community Wardens

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Committee Secretary: Zoe Folley 4532

Recommendations:

- (1) To note the attached information on Neighbourhood/Community Wardens;**
- (2) To agree the steps to be undertaken to determine the review including the suggestion to:**
 - (a) delegate the topic to a smaller sub group of the Panel's Membership for consideration;**
 - (b) pursue discussions with the Police and the Eastern Warden Resource Committee including fact finding visits;**
 - (c) formulate a work plan with a completion date of September 2006 for the 2007/08 Budget.**

Introduction

1. (Joint Chief Executive (Community))/(Head of Environmental Services). In considering matters in relation to the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005, the Scrutiny Panel has requested information to enable them to consider issues around the provision of uniformed Neighbourhood/Community Wardens.
2. Councillor Mrs Whitehouse has offered to prepare a paper for the Scrutiny Panel setting out her ambitions in relation to this topic.
3. Information has been put together to introduce the topic and enable Members to plan how they wish to carry out the investigation. The papers are:
 - **Appendix 1** – A briefing note prepared by the Government Office for the East of England (GO East) which sets out some brief explanations around the Warden concept.
 - **Appendix 2** – A research summary issued by the ODPM which sets out the keys lessons and findings from a national evaluation of the Neighbourhood Warden's Programme.
 - **Appendix 3** – A statement of fundamental principles issued by the Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland (ACPO).
 - **Appendix 4** - Copy of a speech given by Jim Fitzpatrick (a Government Minister) on 13 February 2006.

- **Appendix 5** - Copy of a newsletter issued by the ODPM in February 2006; and
- **Appendix 6** – Page 126-135 from the draft guidance on the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 which deal with fixed penalty notices.

Fixed Penalty Notices

4. The Council has yet to decide whether it wishes to use these new powers and if so the circumstances in which the powers are to be used. Ben Bradshaw, the Environmental Quality Minister in a recent speech to the Keep Britain Tidy conference, expressed concern about Local Authorities “failing to use powers given to them in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act”, that 40% of fixed penalty notices (FPNs) for environmental crimes issued in 2004/05 have never been paid and said “far too many local authorities are treating FPNs as some kind of voluntary pricing scheme”. The Minister reminded Councils that extended powers should be taken seriously, particularly as they asked for them in the first place.

Enforcement

5. Whatever recommendations the Panel wishes to put forward, it will be seen from Appendix 6 that some of the Fixed Penalty Notices can be issued by Police Community Support Officers. There are twenty Police Community Support Officers operational in the Epping Forest District at the current time of which six are part funded by the District Council (£90,000 per annum). The Service Level Agreement provides for those officers to issue FPNs on behalf of the Council and the Panel may wish to meet with Police Management to see what arrangements can be agreed.

Eastern Warden Resource Centre

6. The Eastern Warden Resource Centre is based in Thurrock and was set up in 2004 with funding from the ODPM for its first year of operation. The Centre has recently submitted its business plan to Government which sets out its proposals to be a fully sustainable facility by 2009. It plans to achieve this largely via the sale of commercial training schemes to support the Warden Service.
7. The Centre is able to arrange various support processes and has offered to meet with the Panel if Members so wish. Their Director, Jane Brooker-Wood says she can arrange to take Members through the different Warden formats that exist in the Eastern Region, visits to existing schemes, specialist presentations, training processes and invites to their Steering Group or Network meetings.

Conclusions

8. The Panel is invited to consider the information supplied and decide how it wishes to take this work forward. The Panel may wish to take forward the project itself or to delegate the task to a smaller group of its Membership. If the Panel wishes to pursue the idea of discussions with the Police and the Eastern Warden Resource Committee then a timetable and work plan will need to be established.

Resources

9. No resources have been provided for within the Council's budget for 2006/07. Therefore if Members wish to put forward any recommendations which will need funding, the Panel should aim to report by the end of September in time for the budget round for 2007/08.