

Recommended Item from Scrutiny Committee held on 23rd March 2010.

842. ESTATE AUDITS - EYES AND EARS

The Head of Community and Street Services presented a report giving details of a proposed change to the estate audits and eyes and ears scheme. It was proposed to end the estate audits due to costs and resource requirements. It was intended to replace them with an emphasis on the need for outside officers to utilise the eyes and ears scheme better.

Members raised their concerns regarding whether there were the resources for officers to utilise the eyes and ears scheme and how it could be seen that the scheme was being used.

The Chief Executive Officer noted that the resources issue would be looked at, but the scheme would need to be in place before the resources necessary could be known. If the scheme could not be managed, a further report would be brought to Members.

The Head of Community and Street Services noted that it was hoped to tie in the eyes and ears request with the CRM system in order to be able to assess the effectiveness of the scheme.

Moved by Councillor J.A. Clifton and seconded by Councillor M. Dooley
RECOMMENDED that the Executive approve the replacement of the Estate Audits with a refreshed 'Eyes and Ears' approach as outlined in the report.

(Director of Neighbourhoods/Head of Democratic Services)

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| Committee: | Scrutiny Committee | Agenda Item No.: | 8 |
| Date: | 23rd March 2010 | Category | 3 |
| Subject: | Estate Audits – Eyes and Ears | Status | open |
| Report by: | Director of Neighbourhoods | | |
| Other Officers involved: | Patch Management Group Senior Management Team Director Neighbourhoods | | |
| Relevant Portfolio Holder | Councillor D. Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Environment | | |

RELEVANT CORPORATE AIMS

COMMUNITY SAFETY – Ensuring that communities are safe and secure
CUSTOMER FOCUSSED SERVICES – Providing excellent customer focused services
REGENERATION – Developing healthy, prosperous and sustainable communities
ENVIRONMENT – Promoting and enhancing a clean and sustainable environment
STRATEGIC ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT – Continually improving our organisation.

TARGETS

To assist everyone in feeling safe and secure at home and outdoors:

- Increase the people ‘who feel safe when outside in their local area during the day’ from 85% to 88% by March 2011
- Increase the people ‘who feel safe when outside in their local area during the night’ from 43% to 45% by March 2011

To improve the quality and consistency of services

- Increase the number of housing repair jobs that are able to be resolved on the first visit to 85%

To protect, enhance and improve the natural and built environment in a sustainable way

- Increase the standard of street cleanliness (litter and detritus) to 95% by March 2011
- Remove all fly tipping within 24 hours of being reported

To continue to monitor, review and improve the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of all Council Services

- Increase ‘Value for Money’ on the services we deliver by achieving our efficiency target of £2.3 million by March 2011

VALUE FOR MONEY

The proposals contained in this report should assist in the early identification of neighbourhood management issues, reduce the need for additional one-off inspections and secure savings through prompt response to service demands.

THE REPORT

Members have for sometime expressed concern at the condition of some of the District's neighbourhoods and the impact this is having upon local communities. Within the "cleaner, greener, safer" agenda these concerns were initially addressed through a short series of Estate Audits at the end of 2005. In early 2007, all of the Council's housing areas were divided up into 37 Estate Audits and carried out by a combination of Members and Officers. Some of the estates were audited together, such as Shuttlewood and Stanfree, where the amount of Council housing is relatively small.

In preparation for the audit a Housing Assistant would undertake checks against the properties / areas to be visited, including:

- The Right To Buy status of all properties
- Assisted garden status
- Anti Social Behaviour problems in the area
- Preparation of relevant paperwork
- Inviting relevant Members and Officers to attend.

The core group attending such Audits usually included a Tenancy Management Officer, Housing Assistant, Repairs Inspector and CAN Ranger. Typically Audits took around 3 hours, sometimes with the attendance of other partners, e.g. the Police.

Following the Audit the issues identified were then processed, reporting through CRM, Repairs, Street Services or other departments. In addition referrals were also made to other organisations, e.g. the County Council.

It soon became apparent, however, that the intensity of such Audits were difficult to resource and raised expectations that as a Council we were unable to meet.

A review of the Estate Audit approach has therefore been undertaken by the Patch Management Group. If Estate Audits are to continue it is considered that every area of the District should be covered. To ensure that all areas of the District are covered it would be necessary to break it down into 77 "Estates". Even by doing this some of the areas are so big that it would be extremely difficult to walk around each Estate within around 3 hours. Based upon the attendance of just the core group this would cost in the region of £40,000 with each Estate being visited approximately once every three years. It is the view of the Patch Management Group that such an approach with a "snapshot" being taken on such an infrequent basis is not meeting either Members concerns or the expectations of the public.

An alternative approach has therefore been considered.

As Members are aware, the “Eyes and Ears” initiative has been in existence for sometime now where issues observed or heard about in communities / areas can be reported for appropriate action to be taken. This voluntary initiative has been embraced by some people but not by others. Difficulties were caused in the early days by a perception that if an Officer reported an issue they were expected to resolve it, regardless of whether or not it was part of their normal duties. This was not the case but it may have contributed to the inconsistent use of “Eyes and Ears”.

At the present moment a total of 245 “Eyes and Ears” forms have been returned over a period of 19 months, considerably less than one per day. If the “Eyes and Ears” initiative were to operate in the manner in which it was originally intended, rather than have a three yearly “snapshot” on neighbourhood issues from an estate Audit, we should be able to have the equivalent of almost a 365 days in the year assessment, with issues being identified for rectification in accordance with agreed standards for service delivery. To enable this to be effective it is proposed to emphasise the need for those Officers who are out and about within the District to report such matters when they are observed.

If Members approve such an approach, current systems will need to be altered to identify which departments are reporting issues and any others who are reporting issues, e.g Members. This would enable monitoring at departmental level to be undertaken and if no “Eyes and Ears” reports are received from departments with Officers regularly “out and about”, this will be raised with the relevant Heads of Service to improve performance.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

The Place Survey identified a number of issues where the public’s perception of the state of their neighbourhood has a profound effect upon their overall satisfaction with a number of services and their general attitude. The proposed extension of the “eyes and ears” initiative should assist in reducing adverse public perception by visibly tackling the issues of importance to them. In particular swifter identification of problems should lead to quicker resolution of them (in accordance with currently agreed standard service response times), hopefully improving people’s pride in their local environment. This should also have an added benefit of beginning to turn around perceived “problem” areas by demonstrating the Council’s commitment to improving them.

The anticipated increase in “Eyes and Ears” referrals should identify local issues and assist in addressing the 11% drop in satisfaction with “keeping land clear of litter and refuse. It should also improve links in other measures. For example, there seems to be a link between rubbish and litter lying around and people’s perceptions of anti social behaviour. By ensuring that areas are clean and tidy, people feel that the area is better cared for, raising confidence

levels, which may influence the way in which they view the Council and the services we provide.

The proposals are intended to identify problems and issues early and as part of everyone's day to day duties. They do not alter the current service standards or delivery times. Neither do they place on the individual reporting an issue responsibility for resolving it, nor will it be a disciplinary matter if issues are not reported by officers.

If Members agree the proposals it is recommended that regular monitoring take place and a review be undertaken after six months to gauge the success of the changes.

IMPLICATIONS

Financial : None

Legal : None

Human Resources : It is anticipated that there will be a short time commitment from the ICT department to revise current systems to enable monitoring of reporting by department. There will also be a short time commitment to undertake a review of the current "Eyes and Ears" forms to enable all necessary information to be captured. Each officer who observes an issue on the "patch" will require a very short time to record and process the "Eyes and Ears" form.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members approve the proposal to replace Estate Audits with a refreshed "Eyes and Ears" approach as outlined in the report.

REASON FOR DECISION

To assist the Council in addressing issues of low public perception in respect of Council services and the neighbourhoods in which people live.

ATTACHMENT: N/A
FILE REFERENCE: Patch Management file
SOURCE DOCUMENT: N/A