

ENVIRONMENT CAPITAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 8
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Report of the Strategic Manager for Regulatory Services

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NEIGHBOURHOODS SERVICES: WORKING TO IMPROVE THE ENVIRONMENT

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide members with an overview of the regulatory service delivery framework within neighbourhoods, as well as proposals for future service delivery in order to facilitate debate, enable challenge, and help identify new opportunities to deliver better outcomes to improve and support local communities.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members of the committee are asked to comment on the framework and direction outlined within the report, with specific reference to those matters raised within section 5 under the heading 'Key Issues'.

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 3.1 At the heart of all the work undertaken by Regulatory Services are the four priorities outlined within the Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-21 for the city. Examples of the contribution made by these services relating to the priorities are:

- Creating opportunities – tackling inequalities
 - Providing placements through the Future Jobs Fund
 - Partnership problem solving exercises to tackle long standing community problems
 - Improving housing standards
 - Licensing HMO's
 - Licensing businesses
- Creating strong and supportive communities
 - Development of street leader scheme
 - Community litter picks
 - Tackling issues that can be divisive in communities e.g. noise, parking problems
 - Helping communities influence licensing decisions impacting on their area
 - Tackling rogue traders and bogus conmen
- Creating the country's environment capital
 - Tackling flytipping, accumulations, littering, dog fouling and fly posting
 - Monitoring air quality across the city
 - Regulating permitted (polluting) processes
 - Ensuring developers take mitigating action against contaminated land
 - Exploring an emissions based taxi licensing scheme
- Delivering substantial and sustainable growth
 - Providing legislative advice and guidance to local businesses
 - Promotion of regional on line business support tool 'ERWIN'
 - Supporting local national business's through the 'Primary Authority Scheme'
 - Increasing internal capacity to deliver better outcomes through strategic partnerships

e.g. regional and joint local authority arrangements

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 In July 2009 a report was put before this committee titled 'Environmental Enforcement and Education'. The report described a landscape that has since changed quite significantly: neighbourhood delivery was in its early stages; low level littering crimes were enforced through an external contract by a company called Xfor; and resources were higher than they are today prior to the economic downturn.
- 4.2 The formal structures supporting Neighbourhood service delivery, Neighbourhood Councils, Neighbourhood Panels, and street surgeries have as a result of their implementation provided both closer links to communities as well as a better understanding of community needs and expectations than ever before. Though the purpose of this report is not to debate these Structures it is important to recognise the valuable information that they provide to regulatory officers to help them ensure that resources are aligned to community needs and priorities.
- 4.3 Previously the committee had debated whether to expand the work undertaken by Xfor, this however ceased to become an option as the financial model became unviable for Xfor, and they withdrew from the agreement to undertake littering enforcement work for the Council. Though the work undertaken by Xfor tackled littering offenders primarily in the city centre the approach did not necessarily promote a balanced or flexible approach to infringements, and consequently is also not felt right for Peterborough at this point in time.
- 4.4 The economic downturn has been the driver for greater internal challenge within the Neighbourhoods Division with regards to how services are both structured and delivered. The need to find efficiencies has in some ways opened up new opportunities as previous delivery models became unsustainable. Following a formal consultation process in the third quarter of this financial year a consolidation of services fulfilling statutory regulatory duties took place resulting in a new team being formed referred to as 'Regulatory Services'. This team comprises the following functions:
- Trading Standards
 - Environmental Health
 - Licensing
 - Parking Enforcement
 - Environmental Enforcement
 - Housing Enforcement
 - Internal Health and Safety

These teams provide the service delivery arm to support the strategic role undertaken by the Divisions three Neighbourhoods managers, and works closely with the rest of the Neighbourhoods Division, notably the Safer Peterborough Team, Housing Team, Community Cohesion, and Social Inclusion officers.

- 4.5 The sustainability has we believe been created by removing historical boundaries which have in the past seen officers largely remain within the professional disciplines in which they have always worked. For example Trading standards staff would rarely cross over into the field of Environmental Health. Though it had some disadvantages this model was fine when there were adequate resources to support largely autonomous functions but continuation of such a model in the current climate would lead to bigger gaps in service delivery and less resilience. By identifying opportunities where staff can become multi-skilled and investing in their development the service will create a staffing resource that delivers value for money, gives greater resilience, is more flexible, offers increased capacity, and provides increased career development opportunities for staff. Removing boundaries also helps facilitate consistency, and the development of fewer, leaner processes and procedures. Areas currently being developed are the roles of Civil Enforcement Officers (Parking Officers), Neighbourhood Enforcement Officers, Pollution Control and Housing Officers.

- 4.6 A further opportunity to increase both resilience and capacity is the development of the street leader's scheme whereby volunteers work with officers to tackle community problems, and improve communities in general. This accompanied by our strategic approach to work with other partners and Councils such as the East of England Trading Standards Authorities Group, the Six Counties Regulatory Forum, and the proposed joint service arrangement with Rutland County Council to deliver regulatory services also strengthens our position.
- 4.7 Regulatory Services has been developing a vision statement, it is felt important that staff understand the ethos that underpins the way services will be delivered (Appendix 1).
- 4.8 By ensuring officers are equipped to utilise the range of regulatory sanctions available to them, as well as possessing the skills to negotiate, persuade and problem solve, they will be able to apply the appropriate measures to address community problems and regulatory breaches. It is proposed to adopt a proportionate approach to regulatory breaches for which a Service wide Enforcement Policy will support decision making. This approach will ensure that a hard line can be taken where necessary while preventing a heavy handed approach where it could be considered inappropriate (Appendix 2 – Draft Enforcement Policy).
- 4.9 Maintaining and building upon good community links is important to Regulatory Services as this not only informs service delivery but helps us understand community concerns and expectations. Community feedback in conjunction with data held by services and partners will through a strategic analysis approach help improve decision making around the use of resources, resourcing being more 'Intelligence led'.
- 4.10 A cornerstone to improving the environment for our communities is the adoption of a holistic approach to resolving community problems; these frequently can be complex and require the support and engagement of other service providers to find sustainable solutions. This approach is one that has been applied for some months in Neighbourhood delivery but still has scope to be developed further. Without such an approach communities can often be left frustrated as only part of an issue is addressed.
- 4.11 With the councils Environmental Capital aspirations, looking after the environment in which our communities live has an added importance. The activities of staff engaged in environmental enforcement have a very real and direct impact on local communities. Though the prompt removal of graffiti, accumulations, fly tipping, and fly posting all help to maintain the environment, and is important to residents it is also necessary to find longer term solutions to problem hotspots.

It is proposed therefore in future that there will be a shift in resource allocation to provide a better balance between a reactive service and one that becomes more proactive strategically pursuing objectives to provide longer term improvements. The development of staff to become more multi-skilled will increase the enforcement potential in this area, greater intelligence helping to lead to the identification of offenders will come from the empowerment of street leaders.

- 4.12 Regulatory services have the ability to impact on the environment in many positive ways, for example:
- Air quality monitoring
 - Control of polluting processes
 - Ensuring effective mitigation is carried out by developers for historically identified contaminated land sites
 - Promoting the correct handling of waste to both residents and businesses
 - Working with manufacturers in the city to reduce packaging, and encourage smaller recyclable solutions
 - Environmental Enforcement
 - Tackling vehicle emissions through licensing

5. KEY ISSUES

- 5.1
- Does Appendix 1 which contains the Draft Vision document for Regulatory Services represent the right direction for regulatory services?
 - Does the Draft Enforcement Policy in Appendix 2 meet the expectations of members regarding when enforcement sanctions are applied, and if not how could it be improved?
 - Section 4.1 provides enforcement statistics covering the last three years, do these reflect member's experiences and do members support a rebalance towards more enforcement?

6. IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no specific implications relating to this item; examples of links to corporate priorities are outlined in section 3.1 of this report.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 No formal consultation is required; the Cabinet Member for Housing Neighbourhoods and Planning oversees regulatory activity in this area.

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 Feedback from the committee will help inform the Regulatory Services Business Plan.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

None

10. APPENDICES

- 10.1 Appendix 1 - Regulatory Services Vision Statement
Appendix 2 - Draft Enforcement Policy