

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting25th October 2007

1. Title of Item/Report

Scrutiny Review of the Neighbourhood Enforcement Service

2. Record of the Decision

Cabinet considered a report prepared by the Housing and Community Safety Select Committee relating to a review it had undertaken of the Council's Neighbourhood Enforcement Service (NES). The review had encompassed an examination of the first year's operation of the Service and made recommendations in order to inform forthcoming decisions regarding its future.

Members were reminded that the Neighbourhood Enforcement Service (NES) was a Council-run service, which had been established in April 2006 in order to concentrate on tackling 'environmental' crime (fly tipping, littering etc) and anti-social behaviour. In order to do this the Service made use of a number of devolved powers including police powers through the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme and local authority powers derived from the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act. These included the power to issue Fixed Penalty Notices.

This represented a significant shift away from the previous warden approach of reporting incidents and providing public reassurance, towards a response-based approach and the taking of direct action by the Enforcement Officers themselves. This decision was taken within the context of a projected increase in Police Community Support Officers and the implementation of Neighbourhood Policing.

It was explained that the NES would be funded until the end of March 2008. The majority of this funding was derived from elements of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. The review was undertaken in order to inform decisions on the future of the NES by assessing the first year performance of the Service.

The Committee found that there was widespread public, Member and stakeholder support for the continuation of the Service. The NES had undertaken 16,793 taskings during the first year of its operation and these ranged from the seizure of alcohol from young people and dealing

with illegal Traveller occupations to the removal of untaxed vehicles and the issuing of fixed penalty notices for flytipping. This represented a significant increase from the number of taskings completed by the Wardens in the last year of their operation (1700).

To enable the service to continue this good work, the Committee felt strongly that when the future of the Service was included in the review of the Medium Term Financial Plan mainstream funding should be found to maintain the Service as the Council could not rely on an allocation of funds from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. In addition, the Committee indicated that it would like to see all options explored regarding funding and that these should include discussions with Parish and Town Councils in order to assess the potential for extra contributions in order to provide for additional cover for such areas, using the arrangement with Ingleby Barwick Parish Council as a model. Discussions should also take place with the DVLA in order to explore the potential for support for future funding arrangements.

The Committee recognised the implications of increasing the amount of publicity regarding the Service and the potential for extra demands on the Service that could result. However, it was clear that there were residents who remained unclear about the role of the service and its place within the partnership arrangements in place to improve community safety within the Borough. It was suggested that enhanced publicity might have a beneficial effect on the type of calls and referrals that came through to the service, thereby improving efficiency alongside allowing the NES to receive due recognition for the role it provided.

Following consideration by Cabinet an action plan would be submitted to the Select Committee setting out how the approved recommendations would be implemented and detailing officers responsible for action and timescales.

In order to ensure continuation of the Service beyond March 2008, the Council would need to consider mainstream funding alongside other priorities. If the Service was continued, the associated costs for 2008/09 would be £740,000, with £646,000 needing to be identified, assuming that other funding remained stable and NRF costs were not used for the Service.

RESOLVED that

1. it be noted that the Housing and Community Safety Select Committee supports the continued provision of a neighbourhood enforcement service to deliver no less a service than that currently delivered and that this aspiration be considered by Council as part of the review of the Medium

Term Financial Plan;

2. consideration be given to incorporating the neighbourhood enforcement service with an out of hours noise control service and increased linkages with the environmental health service;

3. as the funding arrangements for the Service are reviewed, consideration be given to increasing the provision of administration support to the frontline Enforcement Officers;

4. Parish and Town Councils within the Borough be approached to explore the potential for contributions towards the funding of the Service, using the arrangement with Ingleby Barwick Parish Council as an example;

5. the Head of Community Protection continue negotiations with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency with regard to future funding of the NES, and potential support in that regard, including the consideration of performance related options;

6. that there should be enhanced publicity of the role and achievements of the Neighbourhood Enforcement Service, with the emphasis on the services that can be provided;

7. that information be distributed to all Members to further increase understanding of the role of the Neighbourhood Enforcement Service.

3. Reasons for the Decision

The topic was identified during a meeting of the Scrutiny Liaison Forum in January 2007. The Neighbourhood Enforcement Service was established in April 2006 is currently funded until March 2008; a decision will need to be made in order to determine the future of the Service. The review has assessed the first year's operation of the service in order to inform this decision.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

Councillor Mrs McCoy declared a personal, non prejudicial interest in this item as she was a member of Billingham Town Council.

Councillor Mrs Beaumont declared a personal, non prejudicial interest in this item as she was a member of Yarm Town Council.

6. Details of any Dispensations

None

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

By no later than midnight on Friday 2nd November 2007

Proper Officer
29 October 2007