

Subject:	Field Officer Service : Progress Report	
Date of Meeting:	1 July 2019	
Report of:	Executive Director Neighbourhoods, Communities and Housing	
Contact Officer:	Annie Sparks –	
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Ward(s) affected:	All	

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 On the 22nd January 2018 the Neighbourhoods, Inclusion, Communities and Equalities Committee agreed the business case for the creation of a new Field Officer Team.
- 1.2 On the 3rd December 2018 this new team was launched, and at the same time a report went to the Neighbourhood, Inclusion, Communities and Equalities Committee presenting the work that had been done to implement this new service, but also how the team will move forward and develop in the future. At this Committee it was recommended that a further report be submitted to the 1st July 2019 Committee updating on the progress of the team during their first six months of operation.
- 1.3 This new role was part of the wider Communities & Neighbourhoods Portfolio, and focuses on how we deliver enforcement and inspection functions across services to reduce the costs to the council and give a better service to our communities across the city. It is now an established team managing routine complaints and enquiries.
- 1.4 In addition, a key feature of this role is working in our communities and with our communities to promote a more proactive and preventative way of working, that delivers solutions and resolves problems.
- 1.5 This new flexible responsive team, and agile model of service delivery, provides opportunity to not only meet community and service needs, and improve

customer satisfaction, but to also provide the ideal platform to target resources effectively.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Committee are recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the work and progress of the new Field Officer Team during the first six months of operation.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 The objectives of this new Field Officer role are to:-

- Improve customer satisfaction with services through citizen engagement, joined up service delivery making services easier to navigate
- Be better connected, sharing information and expertise with our key partners to avoid duplication, move away from silo working and reduce the number of interactions customers have with different services
- Be smarter with universal services, providing digital solutions for high level transactions, automating connections to back office services, reducing the need for officer intervention and promoting self-help
- Work with communities to build resilience, allowing residents to take greater control to make a difference in their neighbourhoods

3.2 3 elements of the role have been identified:-

1. Enforcement activities that are quick and responsive to customer needs. Timely effective enforcement action resolves problems which will reduce unnecessary demand on partners and services.
2. Gathering intelligence and evidence for existing specialist services. Gathering quick and robust evidence including photographs, mapping and statements to inform these services and enable them to deliver faster, more effective and coordinated enforcement action that is resolving both environmental and community problems.
3. Working proactively promoting behaviour change and community collaboration.

3.3 Based on these objectives, a service delivery model has been created, with the aim of working flexibly across services, preventing duplication, and reducing response times. Also improving the way customers access services, and working proactively with communities.

3.4 To facilitate an agile model of service delivery that remains focused on community and service needs, resources, and seasonal demands, the team are working over 7 days 12.00 to 20.00. Each shift is 9.75 hours and this enables the team to be flexible and work before 12.00, and/or after 20.00. Their

annualised contracts enables flexibility with the days and hours that are worked across the year. Again, this provides a responsive service and the ability to target resources effectively. It also provides a service at times when many other council services are not accessible and do not operate.

- 3.5 The service initially started on the 17th September 2018 delivering only some elements of the team's work portfolio. This allowed IT and workflow arrangements to be tested, and also helped to start to refine working practices and procedures. It has also enabled working relationships with services and partners to start to become established. The service then fully launched on the 3rd December 2018. The work and performance of the team are being monitored and where change is needed this will be quick and responsive. The work streams will be kept under review now that the team is established.
- 3.6 9 services were originally identified as benefitting from support of the team and these are:-
- Regulatory Services
 - Housing
 - Private Sector Housing
 - Planning Enforcement
 - Community Safety
 - City Parks
 - Highways
 - Travellers
 - Seafront Office
- 3.7 The functions being delivered by the Field Officer Team on behalf of the 9 services in scope are detailed in the table in Appendix 1 and were agreed at NICE Committee in January 2018.
- 3.8 Field Officers will be delivering a new innovative way to bring about neighbourhood improvements on behalf of Housing. Housing officers worked with Field Officers to review the service delivery model for estate inspections and developed a new approach to gather ideas and suggestions from residents via an on-line survey. Our Field Officers will hold local community meetings with residents, Councillors, and service providers, to review the results of the survey for each area. The first meetings are planned for August 2019 and the Environmental Survey went live on the website on 27 May 2019.
- 3.9 During these first 6 months of the service we can start to see that the functions being delivered needs to be reviewed, recognising what is effective and efficient and what is not. Targeting resources, and being responsive and agile are key features of this service.
- 3.10 The Field Officer Service is operating citywide to ensure that we deliver a consistent customer service across all our communities. As the service develops opportunities to work on an area/patch basis will be explored
- 3.11 The team is part of the Safer Communities Service and consists of one Field Office Manager and seven permanent Field Officers, and a one year fixed term contract. The team come from backgrounds including local authority, policing, housing, environmental health, parks, highways, licensing, planning enforcement,

and child protection. This range of skills and knowledge across the team is enabling us to shape a new service that brings communities, existing services and partners together to solve problems, find creative solutions, and also explore new ways of working.

- 3.12 The intention has always been that the Field Officer Team is funded from existing budgets across a variety of services. The services currently in scope are located in Neighbourhoods Communities and Housing, and Economy Environment and Culture. At NICE Committee in January 2018 the funding and resources required for the setup of the Field officer Team were agreed.
- 3.13 Setting up the team last financial year required £0.148m compared to budgeted estimate of £0.360m and this was due to delayed recruitment.
- 3.14 Initially all of this has been funded by NCH directorate using a combination of identified budgets of £0.152m, including a contribution of £0.049m from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). For 2019/20 there was a service pressure of £0.160m to fund the Field Officer Team. Long term funding to cover this service pressure was identified at Budget Council Feb 2019.
- 3.15 As we develop this service, and work more closely with partners and services, opportunities for income generation are being explored.

Digital and IT Solutions .

- 3.16 One of the greatest challenges has been creating a service which works across 9 services which all work in different ways, using different technology, systems and processes. All are at different stages of modernisations. Work is ongoing to ensure that the technology can enable fast effective workflow and referrals across services, and support evidence gathering, including photographs and taking of witness statements.
- 3.17 All Field Officers have mobile tablets and were the first team in the council to use this technology. Again, this technology is constantly under review to facilitate working in the field away from the office, and also ensure that work flow across the services is fast and effective.

Training, competency, and sharing and developing good practice with services, partners and our communities.

- 3.18 Training and developing competency have been key features of the implementation programme. This has included training and work shadowing sessions with services and partner agencies. This has included early morning sessions with the outreach homeless service, St Mungo's, in relation to managing our encampments across the city.
- 3.19 This has been an opportunity for services to share training resources and be trained together on common skills such as enforcement and evidence gathering. Delivering training across services provides a forum to share good practice but also ensure consistency.

- 3.20 Field officers have also been out shadowing Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in the new Prevention and Partnership Policing Team with the aim of establishing close working relationships and sharing knowledge/intelligence and experience.
- 3.21 To respond to community needs work is being done to link and align the findings of the new Local Policing Plans new Neighbourhood Action Plans.
- 3.22 East Sussex Fire and Rescue are developing a working relationship with our Field Officers and have been training them to recognise risk and vulnerabilities and ensure fast effect referrals.
- 3.23 The Field Officers have been out shadowing the Business Improvement District Ambassadors to understand how our Field officers can work more closely with our businesses.
- 3.24 Over the last few months Field Officers have been attending residents meetings and Local Action Team Meetings (LATS) across the City to discuss this new role, and this has included attendance at Housing Area Panel Meetings. It is the team's intention to endeavour to ensure that every LAT is attended at least once by a field officer within the first year, to build the confidence of the local community in this new service.
- 3.25 We need to look at how we can work better and more closely with our communities. Participation at meetings is only one method and alternative strategies are being explored.

Out of Hours Noise Service

- 3.26 It was agreed at NICE Committee in January 2018 that £0.042m from the out of Hours Noise Patrol service would be used to fund and resource the Field Officer Team with the aim of reviewing how noise services are delivered out of hours. The original service operated every Friday and Saturday night 22.00 to 03.00 and here were serious concerns raised about both the effectiveness of the original service and the safety of the staff.
- 3.27 Since the full launch of the service on 8th December 2018 an alternative approach to responding to out of hours noise has been adopted. Now customers are able to email or phone in noise complaints on a Friday and Saturday night. These calls and emails have been responded to the following morning with the offer of a visit that day. This intervention on Saturday and Sunday enables there to be immediate face to face dialogue in an environment away from the challenges and distractions experienced when the incident was taking place the night before. This provides an environment where the impact of the disturbance can be properly discussed, including practical solutions to stop the problem escalating.
- 3.28 The aim of the Field Officer Service is to be out and about, dealing with problems and identifying solutions, and having face to face interaction with our customers. Since the initial launch of the team the complaints investigation procedure requires where possible a visit to the perpetrator to discuss the impact of their

actions. This is not just for noise but covers all the complaints dealt with by the team.

- 3.29 We are beginning to notice the impact of this face to face interaction and we are already observing that the number of noise complaints resolved by only one intervention has increased. Early face to face communication is facilitating fast resolution of cases, reducing the number of protracted cases, reducing officer time, and this will lead to greater customer satisfaction.
- 3.30 Currently the revised out of hours noise service only operates over the weekend. To improve the service provided it is proposed that it will now operate 7 days a week.
- 3.31 Currently any domestic noise complaint received Monday to Friday has a 4 day response time. It is proposed that all domestic noise complaints will be responded to within 24 hours and again where possible all perpetrators will receive a face to face visit.
- 3.32 The introduction of the field officers has been an opportunity to modernise how we deliver noise services and provide a faster more responsive service.
- 3.33 We are already seeing that the demand on the out of hours weekend noise service has increased as the profile of the team has developed. The demand on the Field Officer weekend out of hours service is greater than the original Noise Patrol Service.

Early Observations

- 3.34 Since the full launch of the Field Officer Service in December 2018 we can start to see how this new agile model of service delivery is making a difference.
- 3.35 It is still early days to get meaningful data and identify trends but we are starting to monitor the performance of the team, and listen to feedback from our customers. This is helping us to plan and map the team's activity, and understand the value of this service.
- 3.36 The core hours for the service are 12.00 to 20.00 7 days a week. Many council services do not work at weekends or in the evenings. In addition the Field Officers are one of the few council services on annualised contracts, so have the flexibility to work before 12.00 and later into the evening, after 20.00. This has been an ideal opportunity to target problems and use resources effectively. This resource is particularly useful when managing large events in the city. As we move into the summer we can start to identify seasonal trends and be more responsive to these trends and the needs of our communities.
- 3.37 Since December services are also starting to 'task' Field Officers to gather evidence and intelligence relating to more complex case work being managed by the substantive services. This includes colleagues in our Planning Enforcement, and Community Safety Teams, Regulatory Services, and Housing Teams. This supporting evidence can be gathered at weekends and during the evening when many other services do not operate. This thereby helps to conclude cases quickly. A recent cross service training session on enforcement and evidence

gathering techniques is again ensuring consistency of practices across teams and that best practice is being adopted.

- 3.38 To be more responsive and effective we are looking at how we can broaden the use of enforcement tools such as Community Protection Notices.
- 3.39 Some areas of work such as Dog Control have historically been managed by a number of services across the council. The response is often defined by the land that the dog is on eg Park or Seafront and what the dog is doing eg not on a lead, barking, dog fouling. This whole area of work is being reviewed to make it easier to report problems but also make the service more responsive, avoid duplication, and provide a better service for our customers.
- 3.40 As we approach the summer season Field Officers have been working closely with our Seafront Team and have recently introduced 'Field Officer Beach Patrols' during busy weekend periods. These patrols by the field officers pick up on a number of issues including, illegal street trading, cycling on the prom, waste and abandoned articles, BBQs, and dog control. These preventative patrols help change behaviours and makes the seafront a better place to be for all users. Where necessary enforcement powers will be used. This releases the Seafront Team to focus on beach safety, and saving lives.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 To continue to monitor and review the progress and performance of the service.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 This was a key feature of the development and implementation of the team. This included engagement with partners, our communities, staff and our unions. This will continue as the service is developed and kept under review.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This new team and new model of service delivery is providing an opportunity to provide a more responsive effective service, avoid duplication, and improve customer satisfaction. Working across services helps to move from silo working and move to a 'one council approach'. We are developing performance standards that will help us define the value of the service. This new agile way of working makes more effective use of resources and provides a better customer service. ,

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

The funding of the service is referred to in paragraphs 3.13 and 3.14 of the main body of the report. .

Finance Officer Consulted: Michael Bentley

Date: 04/06/19

Legal Implications:

The legal implications of the proposal to set up a Field Officer team were explored when the business case was first mooted and the constitutional changes referred to in the report of January 2018 were subsequently implemented.

This report seeks purely to update members on progress and is not considered to give rise to any new legal implications.

Lawyer Consulted: Victoria Simpson

Date: 05/06/19

Equalities Implications:

An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed for this new role

Sustainability Implications:

The Field Officer roles support stronger community cohesion, facilitating

Sustainability Programme Officer: Date:

Crime & Disorder Implications

Working closely and sharing intelligence and information with Sussex Police and the Crime Reduction Partnership and the Business Improvement District.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications

The risks were presented to NICE Committee in December 2019, including the non-cashable benefits.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendix 1: Field Officer Functions