

Policy Development Scrutiny Committee



Date	09 June 2011
Venue	Town Hall, St Annes
Committee members	Councillor Fabian Craig-Wilson (Chairman) Councillor Leonard Davies (Vice-Chairman) Ben Aitken, Susan Ashton, Julie Brickles, Maxine Chew, Peter Collins, Simon Cox, John Davies, David Donaldson, Charlie Duffy, Tony Ford, Edward Nash, Richard Redcliffe, Elaine Silverwood
Other Councillors	Cheryl Little
Officers	Clare Platt, Allan Oldfield, Tracy Scholes, David Gillett, Bryan Ward, Martin Brownlow, Sarah Wilson, Annie Womack
Others	-

Public Platform

There were no members of the public wishing to speak

1. Declarations of interest

Members were reminded that any personal/prejudicial interests should be declared as required by the Council's Code of Conduct adopted in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000.

2. Confirmation of minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 24 March 2011 as a correct record for signature by the chairman.

3. Substitute members

The following substitutions were reported under council procedure rule 22.3:

Councillor Maxine Chew for Councillor Elizabeth Oades
Councillor Peter Collins for Councillor David Chedd
Councillor Tony Ford for Councillor Karen Henshaw

4. Waste Enforcement

This report was introduced by Allan Oldfield, Director of Customer and Operational Services and Sarah Wilson, Senior Waste Prevention and Enforcement Officer. The report provided details of the approach to waste enforcement, the current activity and the planned future changes. He explained that the term waste enforcement covers dog related, litter and refuse related enforcement.

Mr Oldfield provided a background to and recent history of the waste enforcement service to give some context, and to explain why the Dog Welfare post had been changed to Dog Enforcement Warden.

He advised committee members about other changes intended to achieve maximum impact on dog fouling issues. These changes included the co-ordination of all the employees that have authorised powers to issue penalty notices to people that allow their dogs to foul and fail to clear up after them, such as Beach Patrol Officers and Play Equipment Inspectors.

Further measures already in place included closer working through PACT groups and their representatives, and the co-ordination and sharing of reports, complaints and feedback through the Senior Waste Prevention and Enforcement Officer. The regular monitoring of incidents and feedback from PACT meetings and PCSO's as well as data from employee activity would determine the impact of these measures. Mr Oldfield assured members that the service will be flexible and responsive to changing demands.

He spoke about other aspects of waste management enforcement around refuse and litter. The restructure in 2009 had created two Enforcement Officer posts in the waste prevention team who had authorised powers to issue penalty notices for illegally deposited waste, littering and failure to produce documentation for commercial waste arrangements.

Since then, they had been involved in a number of projects in specific locations to tackle refuse and litter related problems. They had also completed education work across the borough. To date the team had issued over 2,000 warnings to offenders and 13 penalty notices that have generated £300 (£1,600 pending) income.

Members had a number of queries and comments. They included:

- That grass cutting on the A585 is inadequate and causes problems for the litter pickers – can we apply pressure on Enterprise (the contractor) or the Highways Agency to improve this? Mr Oldfield responded that it might be appropriate for the committee to request that a representative comes to scrutiny. It was agreed to take this suggestion to the next Scrutiny Management Board meeting.
- Whether there was any data available to show if there had been an increase in fly-tipping since the closure of HWRC on Snowdon Road.

Ms Wilson replied that it was still too early to have a definitive picture, but that monitoring was ongoing.

- What was the council doing in terms of publicity? Mr Oldfield indicated that there would be a press release later this month and also suggested articles be published in parish news letters, as Cllr Chew had earlier indicated that she had noticed a good local response from that initiative.
- Overflowing dog litter bins were perceived as a problem in Kirkham, and there were too few ordinary litter bins in the town centre. Mr Oldfield undertook to check that emptying schedules were correct and to review the number of bins.
- Were there any plans to update or replace signage about dog fouling? Again Mr Oldfield said that he would look into the issue.

Additionally, Mr Oldfield said that he would do some action planning, informed by the committee's feedback, and would report back to committee in due course.

The committee RESOLVED:

1. To support the allocation of resources to enforcement and the change in focus of the dog service away from welfare and education.
2. To agree to a performance report on the impact of the new measures in respect of dog fouling enforcement when they have had the opportunity to be fully implemented (8 to 12 months).
3. To champion the reporting of waste enforcement offences in their local community to support the limited resources available to address a borough wide issue.

There was no recorded vote as the Chairman decided that the matter was not controversial.

5. Scrutiny Review of Monitored CCTV

Tracy Scholes, Director of Governance and Partnerships, presented this report to the committee. She reminded members that the Community Focus Scrutiny Committee had recently appointed a task and finish group to undertake a review of monitored CCTV within the borough.

The group were tasked with evaluating the effectiveness and value of the monitored CCTV systems (which are installed in Kirkham and St Annes) together with consideration of its suitability for other areas including cost implications. The group examined the benefits, costs and processes involved in providing the service. To fully appreciate the effectiveness, consultation was undertaken with key stakeholders.

Mrs Scholes outlined for members the activities of the T&F group which included considering the key issues, interviews, site visits and a review of pertinent documents and data.

Their key findings were that the monitored CCTV system is considered to be valuable within the community and provided good value for money. It is seen as both a deterrent and a preventative tool in reducing crime and disorder and increasing community safety. It is regularly utilised by the Police to provide evidence when incidents occur.

The group noted that in addition to the monitored CCTV, the Police still make use of private CCTV systems to address community safety/ crime and disorder issues particularly within the Kirkham area. It was suggested that the success of crime and disorder matters was as a result of joined up working using a mixture of private and public technology, neighbourhood policing presence and pro activity amongst traders.

Members expressed concerns that there were plans in Blackpool Council, (through whom the funding is directed to procure the service) to reduce or cease monitoring CCTV and wanted assurance that the monitoring service which Fylde was contractually entitled to receive would not be diminished. They were assured that we have an SLA and the police are committed to fulfilling their contractual obligations. They provide monthly returns and data.

Mrs Scholes also confirmed that the CCTV were monitored at peak times but that outside these hours the cameras were still operational and would record any incidents for later retrieval.

In response to queries about mobile CCTV (which fell outside the remit of the T&F Group) she confirmed that the service had improved and that there was a borough-wide usage of the facility.

Although Fylde Borough Council, Safer Lancashire Board and Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) had all contributed to capital costs of the monitored CCTV scheme, only LSP and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership had been contributing to revenue costs. From 2013/14 the revenue funding from those partners will cease, and members wanted to know how Fylde would meet the revenue costs from that date. Mrs Scholes advised that the sum required had already been accounted for in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. She also confirmed that £5000 per annum was put aside for replacements, should they be needed. It was for the committee to give a view as to whether they were minded to recommend future ongoing funding.

After the debate the committee RESOLVED:

1. To recommended that the Council continues with its commitment to the provision of CCTV monitoring.
2. To recommend that CCTV be extended to other appropriate areas subject to appropriate funding being realised.

3. To seek improved arrangements of the processes and procedures used by the Police (within the Kirkham area) in capturing images from the existing CCTV system as opposed to private CCTV systems.

There was no recorded vote as the Chairman decided that the matter was not controversial.

6. Empty Residential Property Position Statement

This report was a follow up to a report to Community Focus Committee in October 2010, advising members of actions resulting from the recommendations from that Committee, advising of the current position in relation to empty residential properties and proposals to deal with the issues involved. It was presented to members by David Gillett, Housing Manager.

In the previous report to the community focus scrutiny committee a number of specific issues were discussed and identified in relation to the Council developing an Empty property strategy for residential properties in the borough, namely:

- Formal Guidance from government anticipated in December 2010
- Funding opportunities to deal with Empty properties
- Research/desk top work to provide more detailed information on the current position.

These activities had been concluded and were detailed for the committee in respect of each issue.

Mr Gillett told members that an updated position on the numbers of empty homes had been obtained, the primary source being records maintained by the Council Tax section. This showed that there are now 750 dwellings in the category that have been empty for at least 6 months, compared with the previous figure of 528.

He said that the increase may be due in part to the flat housing market. However, the information available through the Council Tax records was of limited value as it is designed for council tax purposes, not for housing services. The system draws no distinction between those houses which are for sale, but are just proving difficult to sell, those like sheltered housing which fail to be occupied, and those few which genuinely fall into a category where the Council's enforcement powers could potentially have an impact.

Under new government guidance for the use of empty dwelling management orders, these would be properties that have been empty for at least 2 years and which are causing 'blight' to the local community. Mr Gillett advised that there are very few of them in Fylde, that intervention can be costly and that there are no funds in the housing budget to meet those costs, although the preliminary stages of intervention action from the council can in some cases

persuade homeowners to at least make some improvements to the appearance of the property.

In respect of any potential reward through the government's proposed empty homes bonus, Mr Gillett said that it was not possible to confirm the detail and any assumption of additional income through that route would be premature at this time.

Members had some queries, in response to which Mr Gillett advised that the service had some success in working with a Housing Association to bring homes back into use. Currently, Housing was working with 3 or 4 owners to bring homes back into use.

He also explained why the enforcement route was expensive, costing around £7k in officer time in order to get a case to Tribunal; the option of compulsory purchase required the council to have the available funds to purchase before selling on.

A question was asked about commercial properties and since that issue was not included in this position statement, members agreed that it would be appropriate to have SMB consider the topic as a potential item for scrutiny.

An undertaking was made to deliver an update report on Empty Residential Properties an annual basis, and additionally to advise committee of any significant changes should they occur, at the time they occurred.

Mr Gillett also advised the committee about proposed next steps which were:

- Develop/complete the empty property matrix in terms of known blight properties
- Agree data collection and analysis requirements with Council Tax section.
- Undertake the empty property questionnaire
- Update the Councils website in terms of an empty property statement as outlined in this report

Following the debate, members RESOLVED:

1. To note the report and the information contained in this position statement

There was no recorded vote as the Chairman decided that the matter was not controversial.
