

Introduction

In October 2013 the Housing, Environment, Transport and Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee began a short focussed scrutiny of Southwark's Community Warden service to check on the value for money and to see if any changes could be made to improve the service.

The Southwark Community Warden Service started in 2001 when the Bermondsey scheme was formed in response to rising crime, hate crime and anti-social behaviour. Since that time the service has been reorganised in various ways in response to community feedback and funding considerations.

Wardens have a range of delegated police powers under the Community Safety Accredited Scheme (CSAS) in addition to enforcing local authority bye laws and legislation.

In Jan 2012 these powers were increased to include all FPNs being issued under the scheme. Using the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 wardens now have the power to issue FPNs for the following offences;

1. Littering
2. Dog fouling
3. Cycling on pavements
4. Fly posting
5. Graffiti

The warden's service currently focuses on three town centres: Elephant and Castle, Camberwell Green and Peckham, a separately funded Better Bankside team and parks (via a smaller parks team). However the service also includes borough wide response to emergencies and particular reported issues outside the three town centres and planned events. There are 31 patrolling wardens and 6 team leaders.

The service operates a single shift pattern where the teams work 8 hours Monday –Friday from 9.30am- 10.30pm. There is a Saturday rota with wardens working between 10am and 6pm. There is a rota providing one team on a Sunday as well the parks liaison officers. However the wardens' service is flexible and can provide cover for planned events over the weekends and Bank Holidays.

The total cost of the wardens' service for 2013/14 is £2.3m. However the direct general fund contribution to the service is just over £1m with the remaining funding from the Better Bankside bid area, Public Realm for the Parks Service and the Housing Revenue account.

Methods used in this scrutiny

To carry out this scrutiny the Housing, Environment, Transport and Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee used the following methods:

- The Sub-committee interviewed the Cabinet Member responsible for the service (Cllr Richard Livingstone)
- The Sub-committee interviewed the senior officers responsible for managing the service. These are Jonathan Toy, Head of Community Safety & Enforcement and Ken Matthews, Warden's, LTRC &Emergency Planning Manager.

- Both the Chair (Cllr Gavin Edwards) and Vice Chair (Cllr Michael Bukola) of the Sub-Committee spent a day on patrol with wardens in various town centres and other parts of the borough.
- The Chair spent some time with the officer responsible for collating the statistics which are used to manage the service and monitor performance. This allowed him to see how the statistics are brought together and used by managers.
- The Chair also collected further information via email communication with officers. Particular thanks to Ken Matthews and Ruth Backhurst for providing this information

Key performance statistics

All warden activity is recorded for performance monitoring purposes. There are a number of key service performance indicators which reflect community concerns. These are summarised in the table below.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	11/12	12/13	13/14 FYTD*
Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) issued	538	696	1,006
FPNs paid	326	455	695
FPN Payments via warden control room	NA	397	611
Environmental reports	11,061	13,321	10,325
Crime/ASB reports	6,268	6,045	4,755
Southwark byelaws	81	277	209
Community Safety Accredited Scheme (CSAS)	1,040	1,720	1,339

* April – Dec 2013

Summary of interview with officers responsible for running the Community Wardens Service.

Officers stated that, in their opinion, the people who use the service value it and feel that the service is very good and the opposite can be said for people who have not used the service.

Ken Matthews reported that the wardens were very hard working and would like to focus on estates and patrol more often to build on this service and develop it with additional powers, but there are only 31 officers and resources are limited.

Officers said that, with the changing profile of the police, the council should look at the advantage we have in our wardens service and how best to use it for the future.

In response to a question regarding a day as a Warden the officer replied, that each and every day is different, during the summer the officer would start at midday and work until anywhere from 8 p.m. to 10.30 p.m.

The day would start with a briefing with team leaders followed by a patrol of highlighted estates. Wardens would then patrol around the schools from about 3 to 4 p.m. then back to the estates before final checks of the area and possibly visit to vulnerable people that are known to officers.

The Chair asked how the wardens were supervised. The officer stated that the supervisor would patrol with wardens or would check where they were and what they were doing from the Warden Control Centre.

Summary of the Chair's day patrolling with Community Wardens

The following is a report from the Chair of the Sub-committee on the day he spent with Community Wardens:

"On 27th November I spent the day out on patrol with Southwark's Community Wardens.

On the 9.30am to 1pm patrol, I went out with two wardens around Elephant and Castle. They knew the area extremely well and it quickly became clear that a big part of their job is dealing with issues arising from drug abuse and homelessness. What impressed me was that the wardens did not simply see their job as 'moving on' rough sleepers. In the subways of Elephant and Castle they did their utmost to make homeless people aware of the support and advice which was available, and to encourage them to attend forthcoming appointments or meetings.

This is not an easy job. On a daily basis they are interacting with people who often have complex psychological problems and have fallen on the hardest of times. Most of the people we spoke to had drug and alcohol related issues and the wardens were trying to get them to safer places where they would find it easier to get help.

During the shift the two person patrol called in around 10 pieces of information ranging from fly-tipping which needed to be cleared and Graffiti which needed to be cleaned. Quite rightly, they see themselves as the eyes and ears of the council.

On our way back to the Queens Road Peckham Control Room at 1pm, the wardens helped avert what could have been a violent incident. One of the wardens spotted that there was a large amount of scrap metal lying in a back alley off a main road. Three men in a van had just pulled over and another man was standing by the metal gesticulating. The wardens approached this man and found out that he had collected together the scrap and was intending to sell it at another location. The men in the van, it turned out, were highly likely to take it away from him in their van, without his permission.

The wardens handled the situation very well. They confronted the men in the van and ensured they left the scene, taking a note of their number-plate. The man who had been threatening violence to defend his scrap metal was calmed down and instructed to remove it within the hour.

In the afternoon I spent time patrolling with the Camberwell team, who were equally diligent. One thing to highlight is a visit we made to an elderly resident who had been recently defrauded. The visit was simply to check he was OK and to reassure him that there were people looking out for him. He clearly appreciated the visit. We also visited a local shop which had recently been the victim of shop-lifting.

Finally, I spent an hour with the warden's information analyst, who does an excellent job of collating the incident reports from the wardens so that the intelligence can be analysed and so those managing the service can ensure the right areas are being patrolled.

The wardens patrols are informed by tasking sheets which they are given at their morning briefing. These come from reports from members of the public, the police and councillors. This formal system of reporting gave me greater confidence that wardens are responding to concerns from Southwark residents, and not just doing the same patrols day in and day out."

Key issues identified

Statistics suggest that since the cuts made in 2007 and 2011 performance of the wardens service has not deteriorated. However, the obvious difference now is that most wardens are focussed on particular town centre areas, and so there is inevitably less coverage of other areas of the borough. In short, the service is doing a good job, given the limited resources available to it.

It may be necessary to review whether the balance of patrols is about right. The impression the chair gained from patrolling Elephant and Castle and Camberwell is that the Camberwell patrol was under less pressure (although still busy). The service is heavily structured around the town centres which is understandable given the financial pressures. But there may be room for more flexibility than is currently being used.

One other key issue appears to be that members of the public have very little knowledge about the work of the Wardens service. This has two negative impacts. Firstly, it means they do not value the service as much as they might. Secondly, it means that they are less likely to report issues to the wardens service.

It is also the Sub-committee's view that local councillors are very well placed to pick up issues from the local community and pass them on to the Wardens Service. Councillors, rather than the council, are often the first port of call for people when they have a concern about environmental issue or anti-social behaviour. However, it is also the sub-committee's view that most councillors are not aware of the briefing and tasking process that takes place within the wardens service on a daily basis. This process allows them to be intelligence led and to respond quickly to community concerns.

It is also essential that Community Wardens are fully trained and up to date with the most recent developments in countering terrorism and extremist activity. If Community Wardens are to participate in such things as weapons sweeps, cordon control, evacuation, traffic diversion and crowd control, they must also be trained regularly and educated about counter terrorism as well as crime prevention. In particular, the North of the borough now hosts iconic buildings such as the Shard which bring new challenges.

It may be that Southwark Community Wardens could be included in "Project Griffin". This is a police initiative which brings together and coordinates the resources of the police, emergency services, local authorities, business and the private sector security industry.

During his visit to the Wardens Service the Vice-Chair reported the "impression that reporting by Wardens was not matched by the amount of issues resolved by their partners in different Council

departments, especially, incidents relating to public realm or environmental queries. Incidents raised several months ago by Wardens had still to be dealt with by other council departments. To that end, would co-locating staff responsible such matters alongside the warden service bring enhanced performance in this area.”

A particular issue was identified regarding Peckham Town Centre Car Park. The Vice-chair reported that because of the general upkeep or maintenance” the car park is “becoming a venue for rough sleeping, urination, and general inappropriate behaviour. There was no visible on-site presence and I am unaware of any functioning CCTV in that immediate area. I believe this and other sites involving tunnels and subways, (particularly in the Elephant & Castle area) to be genuine areas of public concern.”

Recommendations

The Community Wardens service is functioning well. It is a well-managed service which operates under significant pressure, both in terms of finances and demand. Community Wardens themselves carry out a difficult and sometimes dangerous job and deserve to be commended for this. It is noticeable that there is a gap between the reality of their working lives and the outside perception of the role they carry out. It is not uncommon for people to question the usefulness of Community Wardens or even to describe the service as a “waste of money”. This is categorically not true, but it does show there may be a problem with the way the service is engaging with other bodies and the wider public. Some of the recommendations below focus on this issue:

Recommendation 1 – local police team meetings

Although Community Wardens do sometimes attend local police team meetings, this is patchy and is by no means seen as an essential part of their role. The Committee considers police team meetings to have been a successful innovation in bringing the work of the police closer to the public they serve. We believe they provide an opportunity for the wardens service to effectively engage with the public. This is particularly the case in the areas of the borough where the warden service isn't focussed. The police team meetings are useful chance to pick up further intelligence from the local community which can shape their work. Community wardens (not managers) should attend local police team meetings as a matter of routine.

Recommendation 2 – publicly available performance information

To address the lack of knowledge about what Community Wardens do for the borough,

Performance information posted on the [Community Wardens website](#) on a monthly basis. This should be advertised via social media (see recommendation 4)

Recommendation 3 – Quarterly newsletter

Managers should produce a quarterly newsletter on the work of the wardens service which should be made available online. Such a newsletter should take very little time to produce but would help let people know what the service has been doing, but more importantly, remind them that it is a service available to them which they can contact to report various issues.

Recommendation 4 – Social media

The sub-committee is aware that social media is not a magic wand which solves all communication problems (although it is often presented in this way). However, we believe that Southwark Wardens Service would be helped to engage with the public if it maintained a Twitter and Facebook account. Not only would this enable them to push out information about the service (see recommendations 2 & 3) but it would mean that people could report into the service via their own social media accounts. This is not something they can currently do. These reports could then be fed into the tasking meetings held each morning. Social media is increasingly the form of communications which Southwark residents use in order to point out environmental/ASB issues. Southwark Community Wardens service should seek to meet them where they are, not just hope that they will pick up the phone or send an email. The accounts would need to be maintained and updated on a daily basis.

Recommendation 4 - More direct communication with councillors

It is the Sub-committee's view that local councillors are very well placed to pick up issues from the local community and pass them on to the Wardens Service. Councillors, rather than the council, are the first port of call for most people when they have a concern about environmental issue or anti-social behaviour. However, it is also the sub-committee's view that most councillors are not aware of the briefing and tasking process that takes place within the wardens service on a daily basis. The sub-committee recommends that the warden service regularly emails all councillors with performance information and prominently advertising the reporting routes.

Recommendation 5–Annual review

It is important that the flexible nature of the service is maintained. The service is heavily structured around the town centres which is understandable given the financial pressures. But this must be kept under constant review. Each year managers should review the current allocation of wardens to different parts of the borough and consider if changes are needed. This written report should be submitted to the Cabinet member who can then decide if changes are needed.

Recommendation 6 - Co-ordinated push on Peckham Town Centre Car Park

As the vice-chair has noted in his contribution above, problems relating to Peckham Town Centre Car Park have become an issue of concern for some local residents. Clearly there is a need to ensure the area is kept safe and in good condition.

This is not just an issue for the Wardens service. The council needs to make a determined push to sort out these issues as a matter of urgency. The sub-committee recommends that a meeting between managers from the wardens service, street cleaning and other interested departments takes place and produces an action plan. The action plan should be reported to the Cabinet member and the sub-committee.

Recommendation 7 – Project Griffin

It is essential that Community Wardens are fully trained and up to date with the most recent developments in countering terrorism and extremist activity. If Community Wardens are to participate in such things as weapons sweeps, cordon control, evacuation, traffic diversion and

crowd control, they must also be trained regularly and educated about counter terrorism as well as crime prevention. Southwark Community Wardens should be included in "Project Griffin". This is a police initiative which brings together and coordinates the resources of the police, emergency services, local authorities, business and the private sector security industry.