

Cabinet – 19 October 2005

Improving security in local neighbourhoods programme

Portfolio: Councillor Melvin Pitt, Housing and Community Safety

Service Area: Community Safety

Wards: All

Forward Plan: Yes

Summary of report

This report seeks to inform cabinet on two matters that relate to a borough wide Situational Measures Programme:

1. A clearly defined policy to cover all works to be taken forward under the programme. This is to include a section on the closure or diversion of definitive rights of way using sections 118(b) and 119(b) of the Highways Act 1980, as amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.
2. The appointment of contractors to carry out the above works under a schedule of rates contract.

It should be noted that whilst in the body of this report we refer to a situational measures programme, as this describes the nature of interventions taking place, its actual full title is now the Improving Security in Local Neighbourhoods Programme.

The aim of the Situational Measures Programme, which includes alley gating, is to detect and deter crime by making crime difficult to commit. Coinciding with actual crime reduction, the physical appearance of a situational intervention can significantly reduce the fear of crime within an area. The programme will incorporate alley gating projects amongst a range of other potential physical interventions to reduce crime and fear of crime.

Whilst consideration was initially given to an alley gating scheme in its own right, it has become apparent that gating and other situational interventions are closely linked and can be driven by the same mechanisms. Also the nature of the scheme proposed does not fit well with each area being considered in isolation or with the inherent nature of Walsall's housing stock.

As such it is envisaged that this policy and the programme to which it applies will be fairly broad in its approach and in terms of the interventions to which it is relevant. Examples are as listed below.

- Alley Gating
- Fencing

- Vehicle Barriers and Bollards
- Street Lighting
- Security/Amenity lighting

Locations to be considered under the scheme will be identified by the following mechanisms.

- An examination of crime and disorder levels, revealing problem locations and hot spots areas relative to the rest of the borough.
- Locations suggested by Local Neighbourhood Partnerships
- Locations identified through the work of the appropriate partnership delivery group.
- Locations brought to the attention of the Safer Walsall Borough Partnership by any other means (i.e. petitions, elected members or members of the public).

As suggested sites are brought to the attention of the partnership and any necessary initial investigation has taken place, the respective LNP will be asked to comment where relevant on the site in question. Whilst LNPs will not have the power of veto, it is recognised that they represent an invaluable source of local information and will greatly help in identifying local areas of concern. As such LNPs will form a key part of the consultation process.

In conjunction with traditional situational measures, the Council is also seeking to close a number of definitive footpaths/alleys under the provisions introduced by The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. These are footpaths whose status is protected by law and which require a clearly defined legal procedure to be followed if closure is to be achieved. The outcome of this process in terms of achieving closure is also not guaranteed. On 11 May 2004, the Planning and Highways Committee approved the closure of six footpaths under the provisions of this legislation. It is envisaged that further closures or diversions will be proposed.

The programme is being funded through the 2005/06 Capital Programme allocation of £250,000 and is intended to continue as a five year programme until 2010 subject to annual capital funding confirmations. The programme is to be wide ranging in the scope and types of work it covers.

In order for there to be clarity at all levels in terms of both the nature of works undertaken and how sites are to be identified and prioritised, a detailed Situational Crime Interventions policy including a set of proposed prioritisation criteria has been developed. As the document is fairly lengthy, extracts of key sections from the policy are included below. The full document has been developed in consultation with the Situational Measures Steering Group and the Director of the Safer Walsall Borough Partnership. Should Members wish to see the full document, it will be made available in each of the political group rooms.

The policy contains two distinct sections:

- A. Outlines policy on broader situational interventions to be undertaken under the programme.
- B. Outlines policy on the closure or diversion of public rights of way using sections 118(b) and 119(b) of the Highways Act 1980.

In relation to section A of the policy the following criteria for prioritisation have been specified:

- the level of recorded crime and anti social behaviour (including environmental crime)
- the level of any supplementary or anecdotal evidence
- the likely impact of a given intervention
- the level of risk associated with a given intervention
- the ease with which an intervention can be implemented
- the estimated cost of any given intervention
- whether a situational measure is the most appropriate intervention.

Although sites will be assessed using a range of criteria they must, at the outset, demonstrate significant levels of crime or anti social behaviour in order to proceed. It is accepted that recorded crime and disorder reports may not in all instances identify the full extent of any given problem. In order for locations where this applies to be considered under the scheme, other forms of evidence will be considered. Any sites that fall within this category would require strong Police Architectural Liaison Officer support and act either as a generator of, or contributory factor towards, crime and disorder levels. It is however envisaged that identified hot spots will be the primary focus of the programme.

In relation to section B of the policy the following categories of crime, introduced by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, will be considered during prioritisation. These are summarised as;-

Category 1: Robbery, Domestic burglary and vehicle crime

Category 2: Arson, real fear of assault/robbery and drug dealing/taking

Category 3: Noise and disturbing behaviour, anti social behaviour, fly tipping of rubbish, dog fouling and graffiti

A **high** priority will be given to those footpaths which prove demonstrable levels of the type of offences listed under Category 1 above.

A **medium** priority will be given to footpaths which prove demonstrable levels of the type of offences listed under Category 2 above.

The Government has advised that it is unlikely that designations for Areas of High Crime will be made for areas subject to the type of offences listed in Category 3, unless instances are exceptionally high. Details of category 3 offences should be used primarily to support submissions in respect of the higher categories and give a full picture of the extent of problems encountered

The policy clearly sets out a transparent evidence led approach to the identification of sites and as to how they are then taken forward. It also specifies the points that need to be considered and steps undertaken in order to achieve implementation.

Following the adoption of the above approach, a list of priority sites will be established. This is likely to incorporate both short and longer term objectives.

In order for initiatives under this programme to be implemented quickly, a schedule of rates contract has been developed and tendered to operate initially for a two year period and then extending for a further three years to cover the life of the programme.

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Agree to the proposed prioritisation criteria contained within the policy and outlined in the summary of this report to be used to identify priority targets.
2. Delegate the Director of Safer Walsall Borough Partnership to authorise situational improvement measures on sites to be taken forward under section one of the policy (none rights of way) using the prioritisation criteria as described above.
3. Agree that Local Neighbourhood Partnerships will be consulted on relevant site suggestions that have been brought to the attention of the partnership.

Resource and legal considerations

The Council's capital programme 2005 – 2008 includes a five year commitment to the programme. For 2005 – 2006 a budget of £250,000 has been agreed by cabinet and allocated.

Citizen impact

The programme will have a positive impact upon the quality of life of citizens across the borough.

Community safety

The programme seeks to reduce incidents of crime, anti social behaviour and the overall fear of crime by site specific situational interventions. By targeting interventions on an evidence based approach, we can ensure limited resources are expended where they will have the greatest impact and by responding to community concerns we can focus our efforts on issues that matter to the borough's citizens. The programme will impact directly upon several of the Key Priorities as listed in the borough's Crime, Disorder and Drug Misuse Strategy.

Environmental impact

The programme will help the Council to achieve a cleaner, greener and safer borough.

Performance and risk management issues

The programme will be managed by an officer within the Safer Walsall Borough Partnership who will work closely with other officers and West Midlands Police to successfully implement a programme of situational measures. Risks will be taken into account from the outset and will form part of the process by which sites are selected and prioritised. The programme will impact upon five of the Partnership's Key Strategic Priorities and will enable the Council to meet its vision pledge to successfully complete ten interventions by the end of the financial year. The targets, as listed in the strategy, will form a basis by which the programme will be assessed.

Significant risks have been considered and incorporate the following:

Risk 1 - Failure of a given intervention to impact upon the level of crime, disorder and drug misuse. This is to be mitigated by targeting interventions in identified hotspots and through seeking the professional advice of Architectural Liaison and Crime Reduction Officers.

Risk 2 - Failure to deliver projects on time and within budget. This is to be mitigated by the appointment of schedule of rates contractors who have agreed rates for specific items based on schedules drawn up by qualified Landscape Architects. Projects will be developed within the Council's project management framework, which will ensure that projects are completed in reasonable time and with approved resources.

Equality implications

The programme is borough wide and as such available to all residents.

Consultation

Consultation on the form of the policy took place initially through the Partnership's Situational Measures Group. There has also been a level of input from Local Neighbourhood Partnerships which is to be further developed in the future and which provides valuable local intelligence.

Site consultation will be undertaken for all prioritised projects to ensure all designs meet local needs.

Vision 2008

The programme sits well within the Council's vision for 2008 impacting upon several of the key priorities and primarily towards ensuring all people are safe and secure.

Background papers

None

Contact officers

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Signed:

Executive Director: J. Morris

Date: 10 October 2005



Signed:

Portfolio holder: Councillor M. Pitt

Date: 10 October 2005