

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

STREET SCENE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

18 DECEMBER 2006

PRESENT:

Councillor Richard Church	(Chair)
Councillor Trini Crake	
Councillor Jane Duncan	
Councillor Michael Hill	
Mr Keith Ingleson	Co-Optee
Ms Elizabeth Percival	Co-Optee
Tony Spiezick	Street Scene and Environment Manager
Ashok Kapoor	Neighbourhood Warden (Thorpelands Ward)
David Strong	Abandoned Vehicle Inspector
Jim Inch	Housing Litigation Team Leader
Tracy Tiff	Scrutiny Officer
Mr Jeff Freeman	ELVIS Partnership (Northants Police)
Mr Mick Rodden	ELVIS Partnership (Arson Task Force)

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Carl Grimmer, Corporate Manager, and Peter Hackett, Waste Services Manager.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2006 were agreed.

3 Scope of the Review

The scope of the Street Scene Task and Finish Group was agreed.

4 Witness Evidence

(A) ELVIS Partnership

J Freeman, Northants Police, representing the ELVIS Partnership, addressed the Task and Finish Group. He gave a brief background to the Partnership commenting that it comprises the six Northants district Councils, Northamptonshire County Council, Northants Fire, Northants Police, DVLA and the Arson Task Force. ELVIS was launched in June 2005 and is specifically designed to improve: -

- The identification of abandoned cars
- The speed of the removal/inspection of abandoned vehicles

A cost neutral exercise has been achieved. In 2004, the cost of removing an abandoned vehicle to the Local Authorities was in the region of £10 to £40 per vehicle. Coupled with de-pollution costs this equated to around £550,000 per year. With the ELVIS partnership system, the vehicle 'uplifter' pays ELVIS £4 administration costs for every vehicle it removes. Once the vehicle has been removed the registered owner (if applicable) is sent a letter informing them where it is and why it has been removed. They will then be charged with the recovery costs and will have to provide documentation, such as tax and insurance details, to get the vehicle back. It was emphasised that the Local Authorities do not incur a cost from this service.

A central unit receives all abandoned vehicle enquiries and a 'fast track' approach has been adopted. Permission must be obtained from the DVLA to remove a vehicle from the highway and must meet the DVLA's criteria: -

- The vehicle is untaxed and has been so for more than a month
- There has been no change of ownership for five years

Comprehensive criteria would be provided by the DVLA in due course. The Group expressed concern that this was not as yet available and suggested that the Chair writes to the DVLA requesting a copy of the DVLA's criteria for the removal of abandoned cars.

The Partnership has acquired new software that will automatically produce BVPI statistics for the county. Records will be more accurate and will be dispatched quickly. In response to the Group's request, T Spiezick confirmed that he would provide up to date BVPI data, from May to December 2006, to the next meeting.

J Freeman advised of an individual who had a number of untaxed vehicles. To try to bypass the system he parked them on the highway bumper to bumper and at the front and back parked road legal vehicles. ELVIS could not remove the illegal vehicles, as they must not cause damage. The Partnership has skates (side loaders) but these could not be used for vehicles parked bumper to bumper as damage might have been caused.

The Group asked questions and heard: -

- When a call is put into the central unit at ELVIS, the first call of action is to check details on the Police National Computer. If a vehicle inspection is required an email is sent to the relevant Local Authority.
- To remove an untaxed vehicle, consent from the DVLA is required. If this is not granted, ELVIS cannot challenge the decision. The DVLA will not permit ELVIS to remove a vehicle if the tax is less than one month out of date.
- If a vehicle is registered to a disabled individual, a tax disc can be obtained free of charge, but often they have not been obtained.
- When the Partnership was initially set up ELVIS was receiving around 200 calls a day, the majority in relation to abandoned vehicles in Northampton.
- NBC's BVPI in relation to inspecting an abandoned vehicle within 24 hours is exceptional. The Council employs one vehicle inspector. Often calls come into the office after he has left to carry out inspections and methods to contact him by email whilst he is on site are being investigated.
- Regarding the BVPI for collection it was highlighted that this is outside NBC's control. An example was given whereby one vehicle was collected one minute outside the 24-hour target and another three minutes late. These figures are accurately recorded as late.
- It is stated in the contract with the Vehicle Recovery Operators that abandoned vehicles must be removed within 24 hours.

- Vehicle Recovery Operators can get scrap value/ recycling value for the vehicle collected. The approximate scrap value of an average family saloon is around £70. Scrap value is currently running high.
- A problem that ELVIS can encounter is that the vehicle is removed before a Vehicle Recovery Operator gets to the site.
- There are just a couple of De-polluter Vehicle Recovery Operations in Northampton.
- In June 2006 ELVIS ran a promotion exercise inviting the public to surrender vehicles that were untaxed and unroadworthy, this was a success. The exercise may be repeated.
- If a vehicle has been reported to the DVLA as being destroyed but this is not the case, ELVIS can recover it and dispose of it.
- It is estimated that there are 33,000 untaxed vehicles in Northamptonshire.
- A burnout vehicle is removed as a priority regardless of the time of day.
- Abandoned caravans can be removed.

M Rodden, representing the Arson Task Force, ELVIS, circulated statistics for the Mounts, Moulton and Mereway fire stations regarding the number of secondary fires involving derelict or abandoned vehicles. It was stressed that there has been a reduction in these types of fires.

M Rodden advised that the COMPAS website contains statistics from the CDRP and that the Task and Finish Group should be able to obtain a password to obtain raw data.

The Arson Task Force has a target to reduce all fires by 10% by 2010.

The Group was advised that the ELVIS Partnership has been nominated for the LGA's Greener, Cleaner Awards.

J Freeman and M Rodden were thanked for their informative address.

D Strong, Abandoned Vehicle Inspector, addressed the Group. He gave brief details of his role commenting that performance indicators regarding the removal of abandoned vehicles had improved over the past few months.

AGREED: (1) That T Spiezick provides up to date BVPI data, from May to December 2006, to the next meeting.

(2) That the Chair writes to the DVLA requesting a copy of the DVLA's criteria for the removal of abandoned cars.

(B) Neighbourhood Warden

Ashok Kapoor, Neighbourhood Warden (Thorpelands) advised that if he notices an abandoned vehicle in his ward he immediately notifies ELVIS. He also has a problem of untaxed vehicles in his ward and again these are immediately reported.

The majority of NBC's Neighbourhood Wardens are ELVIS trained to remove abandoned vehicles.

A Kapoor circulated photographs of abandoned vehicles in his ward.

In response to a query, if an abandoned vehicle is on private land, contact is made with the owner of the land and they are asked to give authorisation for ELVIS to remove the vehicle.

It was suggested that A Kapoor be asked to attend the next meeting to provide details of side waste and flytipping in the Thorpелands ward.

AGREED: That A Kapoor be asked to attend the next meeting to provide details of side waste and flytipping in the Thorpелands ward.

5 Officer's Reports – Baseline Data

(A) 'Hotspots' for abandoned vehicles

T Spiezick, Environment and Street Scene Manager, advised that the abandoned car 'hotspots' that are visited on a regular basis are:-

- Blackthorn.
- Ecton Brook.
- Various side streets, between, Kettering Road-Wellingborough Road

The worst area for burnouts is Hunsbury park.

Very few vehicles are now abandoned and vandalised as they are removed before this can take place.

The Group heard that the layby on the Wellingborough Road, opposite the Tesco store, now has a two-hour parking restriction in force. If a car is left in the layby it will be served with a 7-day notice and if it has not been removed after this time it will be removed.

The Group commented on areas that it perceived to be 'hotspots' for abandoned cars: -

- At one time Delapre had a number of burnt out vehicles
- Untaxed vehicles in Thorpелands
- Side roads off Wellingborough Road
- Holly Lodge Road

T Spiezick ensured that he would investigate the above.

(B) CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY – STREET SCENE SERVICES

T Spiezick advised that a recent street scene services survey had been undertaken, the result of which were excellent. From those surveyed it was deemed that the service had improved. Last year's survey had received a lot of poor comments, this year's comments were positive.

T Spiezick emphasised that there had been a lot of success within the street scene service.

Survey questionnaires had been circulated by the Neighbourhood Wardens to 850 residents over 18 wards.

This year's survey contained the same questions to that carried out in 2005.

The MORI survey is currently taking place.

T Spiezick added that the Council's BVPI for flytipping was excellent at 99.8% and NBC has one of the best BVPIs for flytipping in the country. Individuals often do not perceive side waste as fly tipping.

The Group asked questions and heard:-

- Prosecutions for flytipping are low, although letters addressed to residents may be found in the waste, hard evidence is required to bring a prosecution. In London (Westminster) all such cases are prosecuted, all have been found guilty and fined £250 each.
- NBC has issued 73 fixed penalty notices for flytipping and approximately 30 have been unpaid.
- The cost to prosecute was prohibitive.

It was suggested that a representative from the Magistrates Court be invited to the next meeting to provide evidence regarding prosecutions for flytipping.

AGREED: That a representative from the Magistrates Court be invited to the next meeting to provide evidence regarding prosecutions for flytipping.

6 Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005

J Inch, Housing Litigation Team Leader, Legal Services, gave the Group a brief précis of the salient points of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005. He advised that the new Act built upon existing legislation.

- A Gating Order is not permitted on main roads. 100% support of residents is no longer required to gate an alleyway.
- If a vehicle has been abandoned, there is no need to serve a notice for its removal.
- Exposing vehicles for sale on the highway is a new part of the Act.
- Littering has been extended to any land in the open air and to water.
- Regarding Litter Clearing Notices, occupiers can be required to remove litter if it is detrimental to the area.
- The new Act gives Local Authorities the power to designate specific areas for distributing printed matter. The exception is for the distribution of religious or political information.
- Penalties for flytipping have been increased.
- Fixed penalty notices have been introduced for various litter droppings.
- The Dog Control Order now includes fouling, dogs on leads, the number of dogs that an individual can own and a total ban of dogs in specified areas.

Regarding the situation of a car that has been in an individual's front garden and not moved for some years, J Inch undertook to provide a response to the next meeting.

AGREED: That J Inch provides a response regarding the situation of a car that has been in an individual's front garden and not moved for some years to the next meeting.

7 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

The next meeting would be held on 18 January 2007 commencing at 5.45pm, the agenda would include: -

- Witness Evidence
Magistrates Court Representative
Neighbourhood Warden
Housing Litigation Team Leader
- Define the questions to be put to the Portfolio Holder at the next meeting
- Officer's Reports:
BVPI data from May 2006 to December 2006
Prosecution criteria/evidence – Flytipping
Fixed Penalty notices details - issues and unpaid fines
Translation Issues

Further meetings were noted as:-

Tuesday 20 February commencing at 6pm
Thursday 15 March commencing at 6.30pm

The meeting concluded at 20:25 hours