

REGENERATION COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 DECEMBER 2014

COMMUNITY WARDENS

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

Author: Mark Lawson, Environmental Services Manager

Summary

This report examines the impact of the changes made to the Community Officer Service by Better for Less and is for information.

1. BACKGROUND

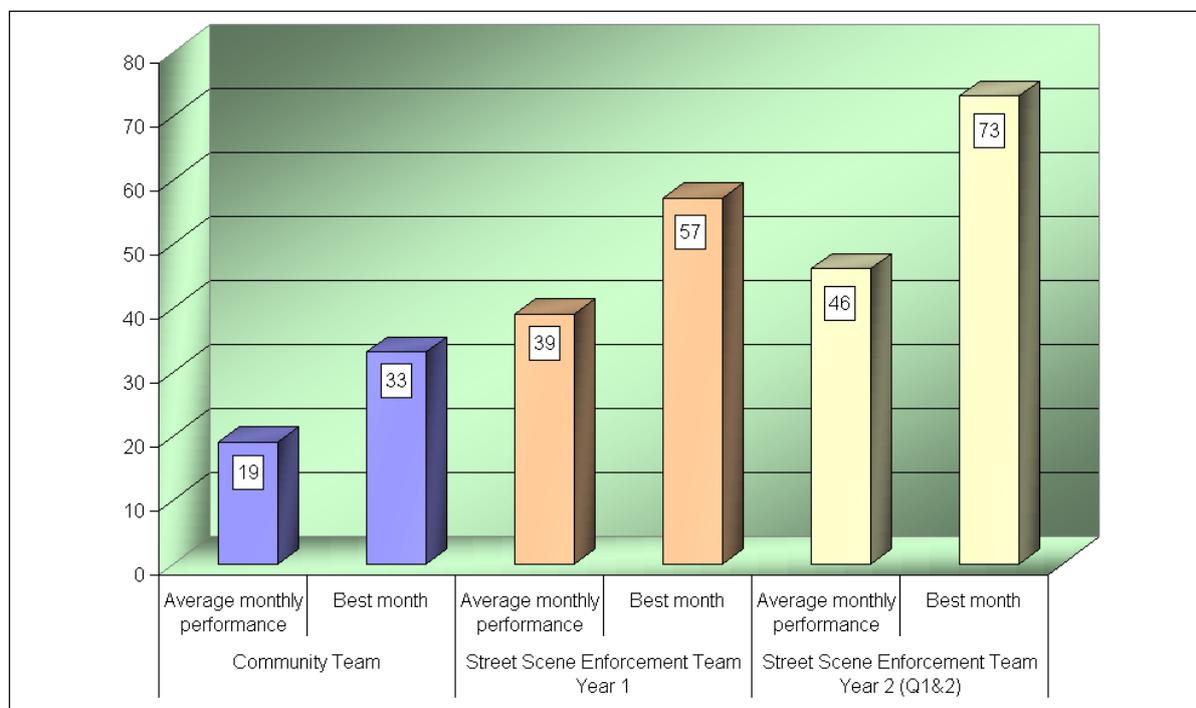
- 1.1 In 2013, phase 3a of the Better for Less programme reviewed the Community Team with a view to finding savings and more efficient ways of working. The team at that time consisted of a Team Leader, 3 x Senior Community Officers, 19 x Community Officers and 6 x Assistant Community Officers.
- 1.2 Their duties included among other things, engaging with the community, enforcing against littering and opening and locking the parks.
- 1.3 There were three considerations that shaped the subsequent restructure.
 1. The conflict between enforcement and engagement. This had often been reported by officers and was of concern to the union.
 2. Opening and locking the parks meant that the service had to be fully operational seven days a week covering early and late shifts and required a large number of staff.
 3. The desire of members to retain a dedicated Community Officer for each Ward.
- 1.4 These concerns were addressed by splitting the staff into two distinct teams. One dealing with low level enforcement activity and the other focusing on the education and engagement role while remaining custodians of a named Ward.
- 1.5 The park locking duties were contracted out to Norse. This meant that the hours of the service could be reduced along with the numbers required to staff it.

2. BENEFITS OF RESTRUCTURE - SAVINGS

- 2.1 The restructure realised a saving of four posts graded at C2. There were no compulsory redundancies, although the change in duties meant that some staff were re graded. That being said, some officers saw an increase in pay following the deletion of the junior posts. The revised structure is attached at appendix 1.
- 2.2 The BfL review of Safer Communities achieved a total saving of £280k. Salary savings in the Community Team contributed £51k towards this.

3. BENEFITS OF RESTRUCTURE – ENFORCEMENT

- 3.1 The restructure has seen the creation of the Street Scene Enforcement Team, a small team consisting of 7 officers and a senior officer, which sits within Environmental Enforcement. Their focus is on littering and the first stage of the fly tipping investigation process.
- 3.2 With regard to litter enforcement, the team has achieved a significant improvement in performance when compared to the previous structure. The graph below relates to the number of fixed penalty notices served. It shows that since the reorganisation, average monthly performance increased by 105% in the first year. In the first two quarters of the second year this increase has been stretched to 142%.



- 3.3 This improvement in performance is due to the fact that there is no longer a conflict in performing this role. Under the previous set up, Community Officers could be carrying out litter enforcement against an individual one day and find themselves trying to positively engage with the same person the next.

- 3.4 This would naturally make it difficult to form a relationship with the public when trying to deliver a community project. The Street Scene Enforcement Team however, are not hindered by these concerns and are free to enforce as appropriate. The performance figures illustrate the benefits of making this a discreet role.
- 3.5 With regard to fly tipping, the team has taken an innovative approach. Previously, Community Officers would make a brief search for evidence (should time allow) before reporting the fly tipped rubbish to the council's contractor for removal.
- 3.6 This meant that the rubbish stayed in situ for at least another two days before it was removed, generating further complaints from the public and attracting additional fly tipping.
- 3.7 The ethos of the new team is that all fly tipping will be investigated. The service has invested in training for the team in relation to the preliminary investigation process. This enables them to gather evidence in compliance with overarching legislation and document their actions to a high evidential standard.
- 3.8 All evidence retrieved is passed to the Environmental Enforcement Team (EET) for further investigation. Since the team was created, referrals to EET have gone from between 6 – 12 per year to over 100.
- 3.9 This has in turn seen an increase in fly tipping prosecutions of 82%. Every case that has been heard at magistrates court so far has resulted in a conviction.
- 3.10 The second part of the ethos is that where possible, fly tipping will be cleared as soon as it has been searched for evidence. To facilitate this, the service has invested in a caged tipper truck.
- 3.11 This means that in the majority of cases, fly tipping is cleared no later than one working day after it has been reported. The fact that it is off the street more quickly means that it does not attract further fly tipping, nor does it generate further complaints tying up more officer time.
- 3.12 On average, 84% of fly tips are cleared by the team on the same day. In the first two quarters of this year, they removed just under 31 tonnes of fly tipping.
- 3.13 Although there have been some issues with duplicate reporting of fly tipping, a data cleansing exercise shows a real terms decrease in reported fly tipping of 20% since the new system was put in place.
- 3.14 The service is working with Customer Contact to refine its reporting systems so as to eliminate duplicate reports and ensure that other incidents (such as refuse out early for example) are not misreported as fly tipping. Once these issues are addressed, it is hoped to report further reductions.

- 3.15 This method of working has proved so successful that the service has just entered into a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Housing to provide the same function on HRA land, generating an income of £12k.

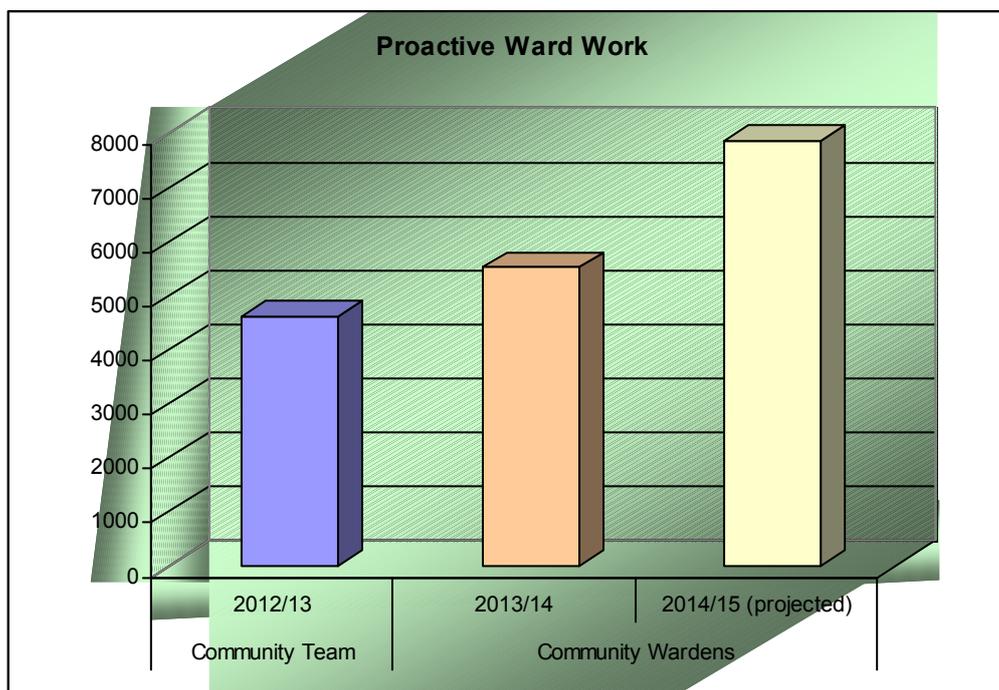
4. BENEFITS OF RESTRUCTURE - ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1 The restructure saw the creation of the Community Warden Team, which consists of 14 officers, 2 senior officers and a team leader. Their focus is on working towards tackling the causes of anti-social behaviour and improving the quality of the local environment, through engagement, education and persuasion.
- 4.2 One of the key ways in which the team engages with the community is by attendance at PACT meetings, where local residents identify areas of concern and partner agencies work together to achieve a resolution.
- 4.3 Community Warden attendance at these meetings provides a presence from Medway Council. Not only can the wardens provide a direct response for those issues within their area of responsibility, they can also feed back information to other council departments on behalf of the residents.
- 4.4 Under the previous set up, complaints were regularly received about Community Officer non attendance at PACT meetings. This was largely due to the team's commitments to locking park gates by the contracted times.
- 4.5 Since the re organisation, Community Wardens have attended 100% of PACT meetings where they have been notified two weeks in advance.
- 4.6 In the first two quarters of this year, the team has attended 29 PACT meetings, from which they have resolved 117 issues of concern for their local communities. A further 70 issues were passed on to other council departments.
- 4.7 In addition to this, Community Wardens have attended numerous other engagement events including the freshers' fair, community fun days, surgeries, healthy walks, residents' associations and neighbourhood panel meetings. All of which are excellent opportunities to engage with the public and get the council's various messages across.

5 WARD OWNERSHIP

- 5.1 The loss of the enforcement element in this role along with the loss of the park locking duties has meant that officers have more time in their day to focus on proactive work in their wards. This can include among other things issues such as littered streets, abandoned vehicles, dog fouling and graffiti.
- 5.2 In the last year of operating under the previous structure, the team dealt with 4627 such issues.
- 5.3 In the first year following re organisation, this figure increased by 19% to 5534

- 5.4 In the first two quarters of this year, the team have dealt with 3,944 issues proactively – a projected 70% increase on the base line by the end of the year.



- 5.5 Community Wardens have also had more liberty to engage with communities proactively. One Warden has given a number of presentations at junior schools encouraging children to look after their local environment.
- 5.6 Another organised a competition for children to design an anti dog fouling poster. The winning entry was fabricated by our sign shop and put up on lampposts in the streets surrounding their school.
- 5.7 In another area, the Warden designed a flyer called “Your Community, Your Warden” and took the time to knock on every door in the ward, meeting residents and dealing with their concerns.
- 5.8 There have been numerous community clean ups across the borough, where Wardens have encouraged local communities to get actively involved and improve their locality, in one case facilitated by the Warden on his day off.
- 5.9 In another case, a Warden has identified an area of unregistered wasteland, which is over grown and full of rubbish and has inspired local residents to take ownership and work towards creating a community garden.
- 5.10 These are just a few examples of the Warden’s achievements and how they have made use of the time created by the re organisation to the benefit of their residents.
- 5.11 A list of officers and the wards for which they are responsible is attached at appendix 2.

6 DOGS

- 6.1 The availability of additional time has also enabled the service to focus on its responsibilities with regard to stray dogs.
- 6.2 In recent years, the number of dogs being handed in by the public has been steadily increasing. It is thought that as a result of the financial crisis, many of these dogs were handed in as “strays” by their owners because they couldn’t afford them.
- 6.3 In the absence of evidence to the contrary, Medway Council has a statutory duty to accept the dogs and to bear the associated costs.
- 6.4 The service reviewed its procedures which, in tandem with a dog chipping campaign has enabled it to return more dogs to their owners and reduce the number of strays going to kennels by 28%.
- 6.5 The team has since received a Gold Award from the RSPCA in recognition of its stray dog procedures.

7 SATISFACTION

- 7.1 In the last year of the previous structure, public satisfaction with Community Officers was at 54% according to the tracker survey.
- 7.2 There was some concern as to whether the respondents knew who the Community Officers were or what they did. This was thought to be due to the fact that their name and appearance were very similar to that of a Police Community Support Officer.
- 7.3 This situation was addressed by changing the name to Community Warden and changing their appearance so as to be distinct from a PCSO. The Wardens were given free reign to design their own uniform and they chose purple as their identifying colour.
- 7.4 Their new and unique identity combined with the raised profile in terms of community engagement has seen an increase in satisfaction on the direct user survey, which now stands at 79%. This represents an increase of 46% on the base line.

8 SUMMARY

- 8.1 By separating the enforcement and engagement roles of the Community Officers and creating two discreet teams, this reorganisation has produced improvements in performance, morale and customer satisfaction as well as realising financial savings and generating income.

9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Regeneration Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee has power under the Council's constitution to review and scrutinise decisions, initiatives and projects and review and scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas.
- 9.2 There are no legal implications as the Committee is asked to note the report.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no financial implications as this report is for information

11. RECOMMENDATION

- 11.1 The Committee is requested to note the report

BACKGROUND PAPERS

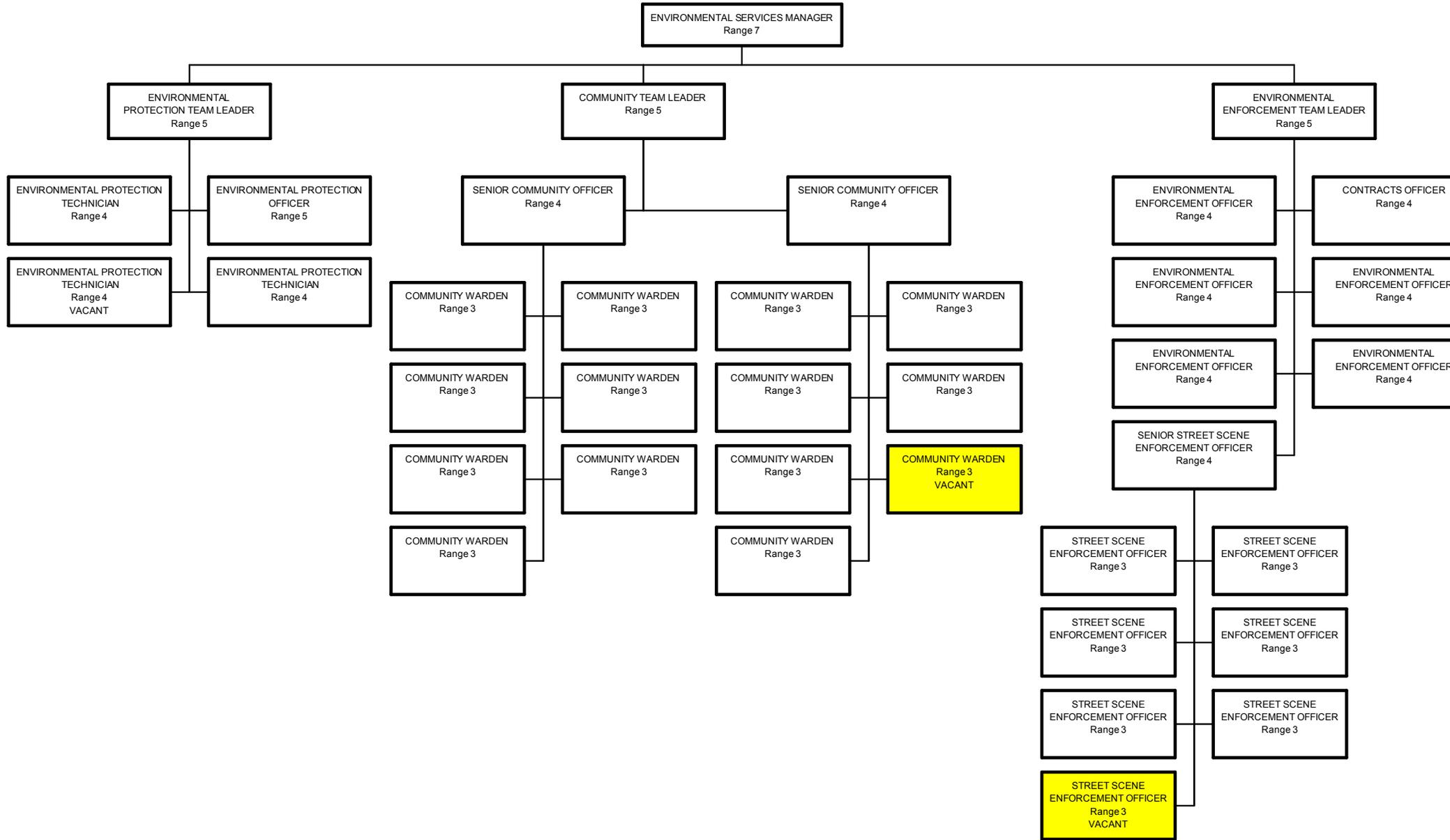
None

CONTACT

Mark Lawson – Environmental Services Manager
Telephone number –1634 3302003 Email: mark.Lawson@medway.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Environmental Services Structure Post BfL



Appendix 2

Name	Ward/Role
Ian Garcia	Team Leader
Russel Songhurst	Senior West Team
Steve Lovick	Senior East Team
<u>East Team</u>	
Nicholas Roberts	Gillingham South
Stephen Whammond	Rainham South / Central
James Copas	Gillingham North
Brian Mooney	Princes Park/ Lordswood & Capstone
Ian Sears	Rainham North/Twydall /Watling
Zehra Mustafa	Peninsular/Strood Rural
Amanda Wallington	Walderslade/Hempstead Wigmore
<u>West Team</u>	
Yusuf Cinar	River
Chris Harrison	Cuxton & Halling/Strood South
Emma Patching	Luton & Wayfield
Muriel Hucks	Chatham Central
Simon Harwood	Rochester West/South & East
Rebecca Pease	Strood South/Rural
Nicola McGill	Watling/Twydall/Rainham North