

Knowledge ...

September 2004

Street Wardens and young people: an evaluation summary

- This briefing is for all those managing and working with Street Warden schemes and young people to improve the liveability of neighbourhoods. This information is presented to inform their planning.
- The National Evaluation of the Street Warden Programme (SWP) has undertaken a comprehensive review of Street Warden schemes and their work with young people and has identified some key messages.
- Young people are widely perceived by residents as participating in anti-social behaviour (ASB). In a representative survey of residents conducted as part of the Street Warden Evaluation (SWE), more than one-third of residents identified “teenagers hanging around on the streets” as being an ASB problem. There is little account of young people being key stakeholders in the community. Street Warden schemes are encouraged to focus their attention on such issues if they are to be thought of as successful by residents.
- Within the deprived areas in which Street Wardens operate there are often few local facilities for young people. This can lead to feelings of alienation.
- Street Wardens can play an important role in bridging the gap between young people and others in the community.
- Schemes that tackle both symptoms and causes of youth ASB are thought to have the most potential to be successful in their implementation.

“There can be no ‘quick wins’ in reducing youth antisocial behaviour. It takes time to get the kids talking to you and to win their trust.” Street Warden Scheme Manager

Introduction: Street Wardens, young people and antisocial behaviour

Street Wardens have the potential to engage with young people to improve the liveability of neighbourhoods by:

- reducing the chances of young people committing or becoming victims of crime;
- reducing fear of crime associated with young people, and lessening the fear of crime amongst young people;
- reducing ASB associated with young people;
- engaging young people in tackling environmental problems; and
- enhancing the social inclusion of young people.

This briefing focuses on the ways in which Street Wardens work with young people. The SWE team have collected information from warden schemes, residents and partner agencies about their relationships and work with young people; these findings are presented here.

Young people are perceived by some residents as causing ASB. Over 36 per cent of residents identified “teenagers hanging around on the streets” as an ASB problem in a representative survey of residents conducted as part of the SWE¹. There is little account of young people being key stakeholders in the community. Street Warden schemes are encouraged to focus their attention on such issues if they are to be thought of as successful by residents.

Our approach to the evaluation

The SWE seeks to answer four key questions:

- **Should it work?** What is the underlying *theory* that underpins the SWP to improve the liveability of neighbourhoods?
- **Can it work?** How has the SWP been implemented in terms of the operational *processes* employed and the management and partnership *structures* used?
- **Does it work?** What *impact* have the Street Wardens had on improving liveability?
- **Is it worth it?** How do the *costs* of the SWP compare with the *benefits* to society?²

Problems for young people

The evaluation team has conducted regular questionnaire surveys to obtain the views of scheme managers. Scheme managers were asked to identify local problems and their perceived severity. In relation to ASB, 100 per cent of scheme managers reported that “teenagers hanging around on the streets” was a problem³. Analysis shows that “teenagers hanging around on the streets”, “drug dealing/use”, and “drunk and rowdy behaviour” were the top three problems, and these were also perceived as the most *severe* problems by scheme managers.

The evaluation team conducted a representative survey of residents which sought their views on the local area and its problems. Residents also identified young people as being responsible for ASB, with more than 35 per cent of residents viewing “teenagers hanging around on the streets” as a problem, particularly those residents in accommodation that was rented from the Council⁴.

Detailed research with case study schemes reflected these opinions and identified the following issues for young people:

- within the scheme areas there are few local facilities for young people, a lack of opportunity for ‘playing’ safely outside, and little public space;

- many young people feel alienated;
- young people seem to cause fear amongst some groups, especially the elderly, simply by virtue of their presence on the street, regardless of whether any actual ‘wrong-doing’ is taking place;
- young people perceive this fear and are less likely to feel that there is a “great deal” or a “fair amount” of community spirit, and they are correspondingly more likely to feel that there is no community spirit, compared to older people⁵; and
- there are many misconceptions of young people.

Wardens have a role to play in changing misconceptions through their interaction with all members of the community. Street Wardens may:

- tackle the symptoms of youth ASB as and when they occur, for example, by stepping in to speak to the perpetrators and working with other agencies to minimise crime and disorder;
- offer activities that counter or redirect the energy of young people in a more positive direction; and
- work with schools and other partner agencies to resolve problems identified by or associated with young people.

Building relationships

The SWE found the following developing themes in wardens’ general day-to-day interaction with young people.

Improving relations with young people: Schemes reported varying levels of co-operation and communication with young people, but in general the SWE found that these relations are improving. Schemes described progress made through repeat engagement with young people, regardless of whether this was initially welcomed. Even in the most hostile areas, wardens found that they were able to get certain groups to engage with them. Warden engagement appears to prevent ASB associated with young people by building relationships between young people and those enforcing ASBOs.

Building trust: Warden schemes felt that progress in improving relations with young people was taking longer than in all of the other areas in which they were working, but that young people often did value the work that they were doing once they understood the role of wardens and did not associate them with the police.

Advocating on behalf of young people: Many wardens have consulted with young people and have advocated on their behalf in local forums. Street Wardens have been particularly active in trying to develop facilities for young people as a means to counter ASB. The wardens are showing young people that they care about them, understand some of the reasons for their problems and are taking action to try to remedy them.

“We try and be fair with them because we understand their situation.” *Street Warden*

Working to change perceptions: Street Wardens are keen to bring young people and the rest of the community together to try to break down barriers and poor perceptions. Wardens try to change perceptions by treating all parties equally, by tackling the problems and by being seen to be fair.

Mediating: As many of the complaints about young people are associated with older people feeling threatened by the presence of youths on the streets rather than acts of ASB, Street Wardens have a strong mediating role to play between these two groups. Many schemes concentrate their efforts

on making young people see how their actions are interpreted by other sections of the community.

“There is this fear that every teenager is going to pop your window out, break into your house. And that’s the feeling I get from... especially the sixty-plusers, there’s this fear of what they see out this window...” **Warden Line Manager**

Street Wardens working in partnership with Education Welfare Officers (EWOs): EWOs, often known as truancy officers, work in the community targeting children who have not been attending school. In schemes that have good relationships with EWOs, Street Wardens use their presence in the community to help identify children who are not in class when they should be. The wardens know where young people are likely to congregate in the day and can call the EWOs to come to the area. Data protection issues are cited as preventing the EWOs specifically asking wardens to look out for particular children; however, Street Wardens can inform the work of EWOs and speed up the process of getting children back into school.

Best practice: The Brightside, Flower and Wincobank Street Wardens work with EWOs to reduce truancy in their area. The EWOs can contact the wardens to look out for groups of children if they believe they are in the area and the wardens will phone EWOs if they spot children while patrolling during school hours. The EWOs will attend with the police and can get children back into school straight away.

Working with schools: Street Wardens see schools as places where they can promote Street Warden schemes and educate children in ways they can help improve their areas. Street Wardens explain to pupils what they do and how children and young people can be involved. Activities include:

- giving talks, for example on environmental issues, personal safety, road safety and fire prevention;
- providing drug prevention information and advice;
- performing anti-bullying work, including talks and mentoring; and
- enhancing citizenship through games and other activities.

Working with off-licences: Many scheme areas report problems with youth ASB related to alcohol consumption. Some schemes have been successful in setting up education campaigns with local off-licences, for example, by issuing posters to remind shop owners and customers of the law regarding the purchase of alcohol. The wardens have adapted their shifts so they can drop in on premises at peak times such as Friday nights and support licensees if they feel threatened by young people. Where there is no co-operation from these businesses, wardens can collect evidence that may lead to the revoking of licences. Wardens will also work with trading standards over the sale of dangerous items such as fireworks and items used for vandalism such as spray-paint.

Best practice: Stockton-on-Tees Street Wardens were able to identify where young people were buying the alcohol consumed on their estate. They took part in the process of warning the store to stop this conduct, before calling in the police after a period of observation.

Wardens working with national programmes: Some warden schemes have joined up with national initiatives to help identify

young people who may be settling into patterns of offending. Accessing these projects often allows schemes to connect young people with resources such as IT facilities.

Liaising with sports and leisure providers: Warden schemes in some areas have been able to seek funding for specific activities by working with sport and leisure departments, who will often provide equipment if the wardens provide their time. Some local authorities feature youth councils, which wardens can also join and which are a good source for learning about youth priorities.

Working to reduce ASB

Street Wardens may work to reduce ASB by:

- attending incidents (reported by partner agencies or residents, or encountered while patrolling);
- assessing whether they can handle a situation or whether the police need to be called; and
- approaching young people, speaking with them to explain the problem and trying to resolve the situation.

This role is highly valued by stakeholders. Street Wardens undertake the following activities to reduce ASB:

Wardens undertake focused ASB patrols: Many schemes target their patrols around school hours, ensuring that their patrols will coincide with routes to and from school at the beginning and end of the day. Schemes also particularly focus their patrols around groups that are victimised by young people, such as the elderly.

Best practice: The Chalvey Neighbourhood Wardens used warden intelligence to feed into the wider community safety partnership, by identifying 30 hot spots for ASB, which the wardens and other agencies now monitor. The wardens update the hot spot list as they identify changes.

Wardens maintain flexibility: Wardens reported that ASB was affected by seasonal variations. This is partly related to the weather and the amount of light available, and partly to the school holidays. For example, there is greater incidence of ASB in the summer and around Christmas. Wardens in many schemes co-ordinate their work around these variations.

Wardens collect evidence for ASBOs: Wardens in several case-study areas are involved in collecting evidence on behalf of housing departments to confer ASBOs. Wardens document the actions of suspects in their notebooks, interview residents where there are complaints and take photographs if vandalism is involved.

Best practice: The New East Manchester Neighbourhood Wardens have been able to maximise the efficiency of their ASB work by working in partnership with a CCTV initiative in the area. Wardens are able to put names to faces when the CCTV system records instances of crime and can request to see footage or print images where it will contribute to their efforts to secure ASBOs.

Wardens operate school runs: Initiatives include ‘walking buses’ where wardens escort children to school. This has added benefits of reducing bullying, enhancing exercise and reassuring parents of their children’s safety.

Diversionsary activities

Since their launch, Street Warden schemes have developed numerous types of diversionsary activities for young people.

References

- 1 Matrix Research and Consultancy Ltd, 2004, Street Wardens Evaluation 11: Residents' Survey Analysis, p11.
- 2 Adapted from Haynes, B., 1999. BMJ; 319:652-653 (11 September).
- 3 Source: SMQ1 response rate = 65.
- 4 Source: National Evaluation of the SWP resident survey.
- 5 Matrix Research and Consultancy Ltd, 2004, Street Wardens Evaluation 11: Residents, Survey Analysis, p13.

These schemes aim to tackle youth ASB by engaging them in more constructive activities, such as:

- sport or hobbies that are intended to improve quality of life for young people and reduce their ASB by giving them new interests; and
- citizenship skills that are intended to build up young people's sense of civic pride and capacity to look after themselves and their areas.

Schemes that tackle the symptoms and causes of youth ASB appear to be most successful. Diversionary activities are valued by warden schemes as a means to tackle both the causes and the symptoms of youth ASB.

Wardens work in partnership: Schemes are particularly likely to work in partnership with other agencies such as youth services when carrying out diversionary activities due to the need to bring in more resources or special skills.

Schemes have dedicated staff: Street Warden schemes have identified some wardens as having responsibilities for diversionary activities. This is, however, time-consuming and many wardens spend their free time undertaking such activities, with the success of the activities therefore dependent upon the goodwill or specific interest of particular wardens.

Wardens champion youth activities: Wardens hold a shared perception that within their areas there are "not enough facilities for kids" and perceive this to be a reason for much of the youth ASB they encounter. Wardens often act as champions for the development and the repair of facilities for young people and have been instrumental in removing the barriers to new facilities.

Best practice: The Hastings Street Wardens volunteered to hold the key for a play park for younger children and undertook to keep an eye on it as well as to open and shut it at the beginning and end of the day. They have also been proactive in collecting the views of skateboarders as to what should be included in a projected skate park.

Wardens can access hard-to-reach young people: Getting access to and having an impact on hard-to-reach groups is something Street Wardens have been able to do. Schemes are

encouraged to consider appropriate activities for such groups of young people.

Wardens receive training: Through their partnerships with voluntary and other agencies, many schemes have been able to secure training. This training gives wardens new skills and abilities that allow them to work more effectively with young people. It also allows schemes to keep up with relevant legal requirements. The SWE found that training was often donated for free to schemes or for a nominal charge where wardens were going to be helping the responsible agency with their work.

Some diversionary activities

- sports activities;
- homework and after school clubs;
- permitting graffiti in certain areas as artistic expression;
- involving young people in 'planting days', using flowers to improve neighbourhoods;
- junior/ young wardens schemes to enhance citizenship and provide work experience.

Issues for schemes to address

Balancing the tension: There is tension between Street Warden schemes' close work with young people and their role in combating ASB. Warden schemes, therefore, need to carefully plan how to manage their relationship with young people. On the one hand, wardens should be approachable and be perceived as figures of trust whom young people can contact if they have a problem. On the other, they are also involved in intervening in youth ASB, passing information to the police and working with schools to ensure attendance. To balance this tension, Street Warden schemes should ensure that the role of the warden is clearly understood by young people.

Working within child protection frameworks: Many schemes have conducted training with partner agencies on child protection issues to ensure that their wardens can work with young people in ways that are wholly compatible with all legal frameworks (for example, ensuring all staff have their records checked with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB)). Schemes need to consider whether such training is needed and ensure that protocols are adhered to. Warden Resource Centres could consider supporting schemes to train wardens in child protection issues.

Understanding the needs of young people: Warden schemes gain intelligence regarding the problems and needs of young people, however, much of this is undertaken on an ad hoc basis. Street Warden schemes need to consider comprehensive ways to gather information regarding the problems young people face within different sections of the community.

Wardens are actively working to bridge gaps between young people and their communities and to address issues of ASB. Warden schemes are encouraged to develop this good practice.

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Epworth House 25 City Road London EC1Y 1AA www.matrixrcl.co.uk
tel +44 (0)20 7684 5777 fax +44 (0)20 7684 5776 email enquiries@matrixrcl.co.uk