

Subject:	Field Officer Team : Progress Report		
Date of Meeting:	14 January 2021		
Report of:	Executive Director for Economy, Environment & Culture		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Annie Sparks	Tel: 01273 292436
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 To provide an update on the work and progress of the Field Officer Team since it was fully launched in December 2018. The progress of this service has routinely been reported to committee. This report includes reference to the impacts of the pandemic, details of the current work pattern, including challenges, successes and good practice.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the update on the work of the Field Officer team be noted.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Team Structure, Service Delivery, Recruitment and Retention

- 3.1 The Field Officer role was part of the wider Communities & Neighbourhoods Portfolio, with a focus on how we deliver enforcement and inspection functions across services and working in our communities and with our communities to promote a more proactive and preventative way of working. Also, with a focus on delivering solutions and resolving problems.
- 3.2 On the 22nd January 2018 the Neighbourhoods, Inclusion, Communities and Equalities Committee (NICE) agreed the business case for the creation of a new Field Officer Team.
- 3.3 The intention has always been that the Field Officer Team is funded from existing budgets across a variety of services. The services still in scope are in Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities, and Economy Environment and Culture. At NICE Committee in January 2018 the funding and resources required for the setup of the Field officer Team were agreed. Setting up the team required £0.360m and thereafter £0.320m per annum.
- 3.4 On the 3rd December 2018 the team was fully launched, and at the same time a report went to the NICE Committee presenting work that had been done to

implement the new service, but also how the team would move forward and develop in the future. A further progress report was submitted to NICE Committee on the 1st July 2019.

- 3.5 February and March 2020 saw the beginning of the COVID – 19 pandemic, and cases emerging across the city. This provided an early insight to the impacts of the escalating pandemic. The response required changes to service delivery models to manage both risk and the changing needs of our communities and businesses. Also, response to the restrictions imposed by central government and the impacts these have had locally and nationally.
- 3.6 3 elements of the role were originally identified:-
1. Enforcement activities that are quick and responsive to customer needs. Timely effective enforcement action resolves problems which will reduce unnecessary demand on partners and services.
 2. Gathering intelligence and evidence for existing specialist services. Gathering quick and robust evidence including photographs, mapping and statements to inform these services and enable them to deliver faster, more effective and coordinated enforcement action that is resolving both environmental and community problems.
 3. Working proactively promoting behaviour change and community collaboration.
- 3.7 Based on these objectives the Field Officer Team was created, with the aim of working flexibly across services, preventing duplication, reducing response times and improving the way customers access services, with improved customer satisfaction. In addition, working proactively with communities.
- 3.8 To facilitate an agile model of service delivery that remains focused on community and service needs, resources, and seasonal demands the team is continuing to work over 7 days 12.00 to 20.00. Each shift is 9.75 hours, and this enables the team to be flexible and work before 12.00, and/or after 20.00. Their annualised contracts enable flexibility with the days and hours that are worked across the year. Again, this provides a responsive service and the ability to target resources effectively. It also provides a service at times when many other council services are not accessible and do not operate.
- 3.9 The Field Officers are not delivering new workstreams but instead delivering existing workstreams on behalf of other services. When the team was established services passed over work for the Field Officers to deliver. This enabled those workstreams to be delivered faster, 7 days a week and early evening. A good example is the investigation of new noise complaints. These were originally investigated by the Environmental Protection Team Monday to Friday. These complaints are now being responded to by Field Officers who can visit people in their homes 7 days a week and early evening. The more complex protracted cases remain with the Environmental Protection Team. This has resulted in targeting resources to deliver services more efficiently, with faster resolution times, and providing better customer service.

- 3.10 To avoid confusion and prevent the creation of additional communication channels the substantive services pass the cases to the duty Field Officer who each day allocates the cases across the team. It has been noted that like many services the cases coming in can be seasonal with greater demand on services over the summer.
- 3.11 Having provided a 7 day a week service it was important that members were able to access the team and refer cases on. A member's enquiry inbox was created to facilitate the flow of referrals from members and this is still in place.
- 3.12 9 services were originally brought into scope to work the Field officer Team, and these were: -
- Regulatory Services
 - Housing Management
 - Private Sector Housing
 - Planning Enforcement
 - Community Safety
 - City Parks
 - Highways
 - Travellers
 - Seafront Office
- 3.13 The functions being delivered by the Field Officer Team on behalf of the services in scope currently include commercial and domestic noise, other nuisance including dust and smoke and drainage investigations, street licensing cases, waste on private land, elements of planning enforcement investigations, and tented encampments. This has not included anti-social behaviour. Anti-social behaviour investigations have remained with Housing Management for housing tenants and Community Safety for all other cases of anti-social behaviour. When requested Field Officers will support these services gathering evidence, information and intelligence.
- 3.14 Over time the functions being delivered have been reviewed, recognising what is working and what is not working, and thereby making the most effective use of the resources available. Being responsive and agile is a key feature of this service. A new additional role adopted by the Field Officers has been working with services managing encampments across the city, including encampments in parks, the highway, seafront and other council land. The Field Officer working model has enabled this to be a 7 day a week response. This has included close working with St Mungo's, who deliver outreach and emergency services for homeless people.
- 3.15 The Field Officer service continues to operate citywide to ensure that we deliver a consistent customer service across all our communities. It is not just delivering services in the city centre but responds to complaints, including attendance at residence meetings in wards right across the city. The table below demonstrates the spread of cases investigated across the city. All complaints are responded to. There is no prioritisation in relation to geographical area. Distribution of complaints in relation to encampments will vary across the city with the majority being in the city centre. The needs of our communities and the issues experienced will differ across the city

Table 1: Field Officer Cases Investigated October 2019 to September 2020

Ward	Total Case Count
Brunswick And Adelaide	111
Central Hove	110
East Brighton	173
Goldsmid	130
Hangleton And Knoll	110
Hanover And Elm Grove	204
Hollingdean And Stanmer	132
Hove Park	52
Moulsecomb And Bevendean	175
North Portslade	80
Patcham	76
Preston Park	109
Queen's Park	250
Regency	217
Rottingdean Coastal	72
South Portslade	90
St. Peter's And North Laine	343
Westbourne	62
Wish	71
Withdean	64
Woodingdean	43
No Ward Recorded	165
	Sum: 2839

3.16 The team is part of the Safer Communities Service and the agreed team structure consists of one Field Office Manager and 7 full time equivalents. The team members have come from a range of backgrounds including local authority, policing, housing, environmental health, parks, highways, licensing, planning

enforcement, child protection and youth justice. This range of skills and knowledge has helped to bring existing services and partners together to solve problems, find creative solutions, and explore new ways of working.

- 3.17 Managing expectation has been a challenge. There is sometimes an expectation that field officers can respond and deliver a wider range of services than agreed at Committee. In the last 2 years other council services have changed delivery models, and in some cases reduced their range of services and increased response times. Responding to tented encampments is an example where changes have occurred. Where gaps and service demands increase there is sometimes expectation that field officers will fill these emerging gaps.
- 3.18 Where field officers have left the team, recruitment has been undertaken in accordance with council recruitment policy and procedures. During the COVID pandemic recruitment processes were reviewed and this was understandably slower as interviews were undertaken virtually and obtaining references and recruitment documentation became protracted. 2 full time and 2 part time field officers have now been recruited and started at the end of November.
- 3.19 Promotion of the service and having a visible service that is out and about being the eyes and ears of the organisation has been important. When the team was established it took part in an introductory video and contributed interviews and biographies to the council's website. Over the last 2 years the retention of staff has sometimes been an issue, and there can be various reasons for this including the challenges of having to deliver such a broad and diverse range of roles, anti-social shift pattern covering weekends and evenings, flat team structure with little career development opportunity, and as with many frontline services challenge and confrontation from service users. A bespoke training programme for new and existing team members has been developed to support career development and assist with retention.
- 3.20 Field Officers have attended various community meetings and the team manager has held one to one meetings with councillors, including area walkarounds to promote the service and encourage the correct reporting of issues of concern
- 3.21 The team has undertaken activities that include working with partners and our communities and supporting council services and having a visible presence. This was done by providing a uniformed presence at events and in neighbourhoods including:
- Marshalling and stewarding at:
 - Brighton Pride
 - Green Pride
 - Brunswick Festival
 - Kemptown Festival
 - Monitoring and enforcement at:
 - Upper Gardner Street Market
 - Seafront patrols
 - Park patrols
 - ASB monitoring on Housing estates.

- 3.22 These activities took place in 2019 but were largely curtailed by the COVID restrictions imposed in the summer of 2020. In the last year we have lost the opportunity to build upon the lessons learnt in the first year. It is hoped that these visits and patrols can be reintroduced in the coming year.
- 3.23 Field Officers now investigate all new domestic and commercial noise and nuisance complaints with the aim that perpetrators will be visited to discuss the impact of their actions. We are seeing the value and benefit of this face to face contact and how it is stopping cases escalating. This happens 7 days a week and early evening. This face to face intervention provides an environment where the impact of the disturbance can be properly discussed, including practical solutions to stop the problem escalating.
- 3.24 The Field Officers have developed a flexible and creative approach to enforcement. 90% of nuisance investigations are resolved without the need for a second call from the complainant by instigating clear communication with subjects and complainants and the use of education, mediation and negotiation. The benefits of this approach include a reduction in economic cost, more rapid resolution of cases and increased customer satisfaction.
- 3.25 The Field Officer Team has assisted colleagues in Housing to produce and deliver the Estate Improvement Programme and 20% of all jobs investigated by the Field Officers are reported by occupants of Council owned housing.
- 3.26 In many nuisance cases the root cause of the dispute is a breakdown in the relationship between neighbours. Early contact by the Field Officer team with parties in dispute has enabled resolution of disputes without escalation and encouraged and facilitated greater understanding between neighbours. The Field Officers also refer clients to the Brighton and Hove Independent Mediation Service (BHIMS) for specialist mediation services if requested by the client. The Field Officers and BHIMS have recently achieved an increase in uptake and satisfaction by enabling the Field Officers to support clients when self-reporting to the mediation service. This has been particularly important during the pandemic where residents have been isolated at home and the impact from noisy neighbours can be greater. BHIMS have spoken to individuals and helped explore self-help options and access to other support services.
- 3.27 Since the implementation of the Field Officer Team the Environmental Enforcement Team has become established and picks up on the portfolio of waste and street furniture enforcement.

Digital and IT Solutions

- 3.28 How the Field Officers access the different various service specific databases and software has been a challenge. All have been at different stages of modernisation. One of the aims of service delivery was to ensure that the technology available to the team can enable fast effective workflow and referrals across services. Also support evidence gathering, including photographs and taking of witness statements.
- 3.29 All Field Officers were provided with mobile tablets and were the first team in the council to use this technology. The UNIFORM App was intended to link

Regulatory Services and Planning Enforcement workstreams to officers in the field and facilitate fast workflow. The UNIFORM App failed to function as originally specified. The benefits of mobile access to workflow streams have consequently not been realised and further work will be required to consider alternative solutions.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The Council is not considering alternatives to the Field Officer service currently, but service and functions will be kept under review to ensure a flexible response.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Where possible Field Officers visit residents and businesses to understand complaints and help to identify resolutions. Field officers are some of the 'eyes and ears' for the council being able to refer matter to services and partners.
- 5.2 Being part of community meetings across the city enables the Field officers to start to understand local needs. This has included attendance at Area Panels. Also, attendance at city events including Pride and the Brunswick Festival.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Delivery of this service has been done in accordance with the original model approved at Committee and subject to further progress reports.
- 6.2 Providing a service which crosses a range of services has been challenging particularly as all services are at different stages of modernisation and digitalisation. It has been an opportunity to deliver and develop service improvement and be more coordinated in how we modernise services.
- 6.3 The COVID – 19 pandemic has presented several challenges to services. Ensuring safety of staff and our communities and businesses has restricted visits, and response times and slowed down recruitment process. How services are delivered to meet the needs of our communities and businesses has been kept under review.
- 6.4 The service will continue to be responsive and agile to meet customer and service needs. This will have regard to local and national COVID – 19 restrictions.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The gross budget for the Field Officer team is currently £0.376m and is funded from capital resources of £0.312m (as per agreed budget amendment in February 2019) and a budget contribution of £0.064m from the HRA.
- 7.2 The budget amendment referred to above assumed that the Field Officer project will generate savings to the General Fund from 2022/23 of £0.312m. Members are advised that if these savings do not materialise, in whole or in part, by

2022/23, this will create an additional budget pressure and add to the predicted budget gap for 2022/23..

Finance Officer Consulted: Michael Bentley

Date: 10.12.20

Legal Implications:

7.3 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Lawyer Consulted:

Elizabeth Culbert

Date: 29.12.20

Equalities Implications:

7.4 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) was originally completed for this role. An updated assessment has not been undertaken but will be with any future review of the service

Sustainability Implications:

7.5 None

Brexit Implications:

None

Crime & Disorder Implications:

7.6 Working closely and sharing intelligence and information with Sussex Police and the Crime Reduction Partnership and the Business Improvement District

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

7.7 None.

Public Health Implications:

7.8 None

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

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7.9

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices: None

