

Research Report 24

*National Evaluation of the Street
Wardens Programme*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The National Evaluation of the Street Wardens Programme was undertaken by a consortium of organisations led by Matrix

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1 Executive summary

Background

The Street Wardens Programme (SWP) was allocated £35 million, over the three and a half years leading up to March 2005, to pump-prime the establishment of street warden teams across the country, jointly funded by local organisations. These teams were given the central goal of improving the liveability of deprived areas, specifically through:

- improving the physical appearance of streets;
- fostering social inclusion;
- reducing crime and fear of crime; and
- deterring anti-social behaviour (ASB).

The objective of the SWP to tackle area-specific problems has led to the broad definition of warden activities as tackling “nuisances, incivilities and inconveniences” by:

- being a uniformed, visible presence other than the police;
- co-ordinating the provision of local services;
- providing reassurance to local residents;
- having a broad responsibility for problem solving; and
- fostering social inclusion and community spirit.

Beyond this, the exact function of the SWP was not prescribed. The loose definition of the role of the SWP, and the diverse range of local-level problems has resulted in wardens adopting a diverse range of interventions across the 121 schemes established throughout the nine Government Offices. These include different combinations and types of patrolling, reporting, promoting, diversionary activities, direct action, enforcing, supporting and community facilitation. The commonalities are that schemes:

- feature teams of wardens who spend their time patrolling the streets, supported by managers;
- have a parent organisation that has an influence on the emphasis of their work; and
- rely on partnerships with a range of other agencies to deliver their interventions.

Street wardens are charged with improving the physical appearance of streets and provide “*a visible, recognisable presence to deter crime and tackle low-level anti-social behaviour*”¹. They work to tackle social exclusion and are intended as a key link between local agency partnerships that can result in joined-up solutions at a local level.

Implementation

Characteristics of a good warden scheme

While the SWP has the potential to contribute to the liveability agenda at a local level, it must be implemented well before this potential can be achieved. The characteristics of a well implemented warden scheme include having:

- an understanding of the needs of the local area;
- an understanding of the local mainstream service provision context; and
- effective relationships with its partner agencies made up of:
 - strategic and managerial links with the partner agency to ensure commitment to the warden scheme;
 - regular communication;
 - joint planning to ensure that activities do not conflict and that the agencies complement rather than duplicate work and that there are clearly delineated areas of individual responsibility;
- coterminous boundaries;
- being part of a partnership framework give schemes the opportunity to promote joint working with other agencies; and
- formal agreements, which are valuable in maintaining consistency of service, especially when key personnel leave. This is especially important in the context of the reliance of warden-partner relationships on the existing network of contacts of the scheme manager. While the wardens have tended to develop good partner relationships, they have achieved this through the informal networks of their scheme managers rather than through formal agreements with partners.

Implementing appropriate interventions

Wardens undertake a range of interventions. By far the most commonly used is patrolling. The visibility that patrolling affords wardens is integral to the SWP. It provides a reassuring and deterring presence in the community. A crucial factor in determining the successful implementation of warden patrols is ‘dosage’ – the resources wardens have compared with the size and nature of the area they are

1 The National Strategy Action Plan for Neighbourhood Renewal, The Social Exclusion Unit (January 2001), p.36.

responsible for. For instance, if the objective is to reduce crime, the patrols need to be intensive and on foot. On the other hand, if the objective is to improve environmental management, the patrols can be less intensive.

Patrolling is not, however, only an intervention in itself. Patrolling also allows wardens to identify problems to report or deal with themselves, and ensures that wardens engage with the community. Most time is spent by wardens on patrolling and reporting interventions. However, as the programme has matured and wardens have learnt what works, they have gradually shifted away from simply patrolling and reporting, towards supporting and taking direct action.

The appropriate mix of reporting and ‘carrying out’ interventions varies with:

- the problems faced by residents;
- the resources and skills possessed by the scheme;
- the jurisdiction of mainstream service providers; and
- the ability of mainstream providers to respond to warden reports.

Street wardens have been generally successful in identifying local problems and developing appropriate objectives. The problems identified tend to be those highlighted by local residents. The warden scheme manager has an important role in focusing wardens on local problems. Most scheme managers have had prior experience of working with local mainstream services and knowledge of the ‘liveability’ agenda in the local area. This means that most managers already know the priorities of the local area and should have the networks to make informal information sharing work. When a scheme manager does not have such prior knowledge of the area, more formal information sharing agreements and systematic community engagement may be required for successful problem identification.

The importance of mainstream service providers to the effective delivery of warden interventions means that for successful implementation, wardens are required to do the following:

- They must know the services provided by mainstream service providers and avoid duplicating this role. Process mapping of current provision should help wardens gain this knowledge. However, very few wardens undertake this process formally. Instead, they rely on existing scheme manager knowledge or allow interventions to develop as they learn what works in their area.
- They must also have good relationships with mainstream providers so that their reports are acted on. As mainstream service providers face resource constraints, warden reports have to compete for attention with other demands. Wardens have found that having a named contact at the service provider or a protocol describing wardens’ and service providers’ roles and responsibilities are necessary for reports to be dealt with effectively.

Partnership working

Partner relationships are key to the successful implementation of the SWP. Productive partner relationships ensure that warden reports are acted on, that wardens get access to information concerning local area need, and that operational protocols can be developed to avoid duplication of activities. The evaluation has identified good relationships between wardens and partners. Partners are aware of the value wardens bring to service delivery, especially as the 'eyes and ears' of service providers on the ground. There is also evidence that the existence of wardens enables new teams of providers to be formed, provoking a rethink about the way local services are delivered.

Steering groups

One of the ways wardens engage with partners is through their steering groups. Steering groups represent a diverse range of partners, including the police, Local Authorities, crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRPs), etc, and provide a strategic steer to the schemes. Steering group membership is diverse, and wardens have sometimes struggled to engage certain partners through their steering groups:

- there is a lack of Local Authority environmental management team involvement despite the focus of warden objectives in this area;
- there is a lack of Drug Action Team (DAT) and Youth Offending Team (YOT) representatives on steering groups; and
- there is difficulty in engaging the local community through the steering groups. Where schemes have successfully recruited representatives, there are concerns over how representative community participation is.

Effective steering groups require clearly defined terms of reference, roles and responsibilities, and a published agenda. It is also important that steering groups engage and challenge wardens. However, there is evidence that some wardens are not always fully engaged with their steering groups and can be confused about the group's role.

Impact

Changes in SWP areas

Findings from a survey of residents suggest that liveability, as measured by a number of parameters, has improved in the street warden areas since the establishment of the SWP:

- the majority of residents in street warden areas are more satisfied with their local area as a place to live (74 per cent) than they were two years ago (71 per cent satisfied in 2003);
- a greater proportion of residents in street warden areas felt that the areas had improved over the last two years in 2005 (19 per cent) compared with 2003 (16 per cent);

- residents in street warden areas are slightly less likely to experience crime than they were in 2003; 75 per cent say they have not experienced any crime over the last year, compared with 69 per cent two years ago; and
- residents in street warden areas felt their neighbourhood was better than it was in 2003 in terms of environmental problems, social inclusion, anti-social behaviour and fear of crime.

The results were not uniform across all street warden areas. Generally, residents of case study area 1 and case study area 5 reported greater improvements than residents from other areas.

SWP impact on liveability

In spite of the positive results, it is not possible to attribute the improvements described above conclusively to the SWP. The pattern of neighbourhood improvement perceived by residents is replicated in comparator areas where there were no street warden schemes in place. There may be a number of reasons for this:

- The SWP consists of a number of different approaches and varying degrees of implementation success (implementation variability) ;
- the impact of the SWP could be dispersed to other local areas (diffusion of benefits);
- local authorities may have directed other resources or area-based initiatives which are similar to street wardens in the comparator areas to ensure that resources are distributed fairly; and
- in at least one area, the SWP was considered so successful by the local authority that it was expanded to include part of the comparator area.

Interestingly, nearly half of all residents in the comparator areas reported being aware of a street warden scheme in their area, despite the fact that they were originally selected on the basis that they did not feature a scheme. This may reflect the existence of other initiatives in comparator areas, the fact that successful SWP marketing reaches beyond its immediate area, or other causes.

Whatever the reason, the research did show a positive relationship between awareness of and contact with street wardens, and perceptions that the neighbourhood had improved. This holds for comparator areas as well as SWP areas.

The cost of the SWP

The cost of the street warden schemes studied varied substantially (c£0.15m to c£0.45m per annum). The variation in these costs was associated with the size of the warden team and the geographical area covered by the team.

The SWP is also likely to have a significant impact on other agency costs. The extent of these costs will depend on the interventions adopted by the scheme. While a reporting-focused scheme will tend to generate work for other agencies, putting their

resources under pressure, a scheme that deals with its own problems may free up the resources of other agencies. The planning of warden schemes should consider these potential costs to other agencies.

Conclusion

Has the SWP been successful?

There is no straightforward answer to this question. It is neither an equivocal 'yes' nor an equivocal 'no'. The objective of the SWP is to improve the liveability of deprived areas and specifically to improve the physical appearance of streets, foster social inclusion, reduce crime and fear of crime and deter anti-social behaviour. There have been improvements across these measures for SWP areas studied. However, there have also been similar improvements across these measures in the comparator areas.

Reasons why it is difficult to give an unequivocal answer include the following:

- there are difficulties in isolating any change in liveability due to 'liveability' being a difficult concept to define and measure;
- the complexity of the policy environment surrounding the liveability agenda;
- the existence of myriad overlapping interventions designed to improve liveability being implemented simultaneously; and
- the lack of prescription regarding the function and the diverse range of local-level problems that wardens attempt to alleviate has resulted in wardens adopting a diverse range of interventions, including different combinations and types of patrolling, reporting, promoting, diversionary activities, direct action, enforcing, supporting and community facilitation. The appropriateness and effectiveness of these activities depends on the problems of the area in which wardens are located, the resources available to the individual scheme and the mainstream service context in which it operates;

However, despite these difficulties in measuring impact, the programme has generally been successfully implemented. To determine the appropriate balance of interventions, it is important that wardens:

- understand the needs of the local area. Wardens tend to have achieved this;
- understand the local service provision context, and in particular where there are gaps in the local service provision where wardens can operate effectively. Wardens generally have a reasonable knowledge of local mainstream services;
- develop productive relationships with partner agencies to ensure that warden reporting activities are acted on, wardens get access to information concerning local area needs, and operational protocols can be developed to avoid duplication of activities. Wardens have tended to develop informal relationships with partner agencies. Partners are aware of the value wardens bring to service delivery, especially as the 'eyes and ears' of service providers on the ground. There is also evidence the existence of wardens is enabling new teams of providers to be formed, provoking a rethink about the way local services are delivered.

In summary, while no change in liveability can be attributed solely to the SWP and the quality of implementation varies between scheme areas, overall the SWP has been well implemented, and there is qualitative, case-study evidence that they have made a difference in their local areas, especially in the area of environmental management.

Policy implications

Wardens are seen as a key mechanism for implementing the liveability agenda. As such, wardens potentially have a central role to play in the plans of local authorities rolling out a neighbourhood management model. An important question in this context is whether wardens or some alternative, such as Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), are the more effective intervention.

There were initial fears among wardens that the introduction of PCSOs would be damaging to the prospects of the schemes due to staff retention problems and the reduced willingness of the police to work with wardens. These fears have declined as experience has shown that wardens and PCSOs can provide different and complementary functions:

- Wardens are a popular local resource that communities value for their ownership of an area and their ability to cross demarcations and join up service provision. They are not usually police-affiliated, they take responsibility for environmental management and social inclusion issues and their focus is around caring, improving and supporting a specific area.
- PCSOs are a moveable resource, with less familiarity with an area, but able to reduce the police burden by dealing with a range of low-level ASB and crime issues. For wardens operating in areas where there are PCSOs, making this distinction has been important.

Different approaches have emerged to the co-existence of wardens and PCSOs:

- Some warden schemes carry out more environmental management work, while others do more work with young people either through visits and activities with schools or through the provision of diversionary activities.
- Others do not share the view that the introduction of PCSOs should lead to a rationalisation of functions for wardens schemes, seeking instead to complement their provision through focusing on ASB and crime as part of an integrated CDRP effort towards reducing these problems.

The examples of warden-PCSO partnership working identified suggest that wardens and PCSOs can co-exist so long as both parties:

- agree on expectations, demarcations and responsibilities as soon as possible;
- share intelligence on crime and ASB;
- avoid duplication in patrols;
- work together on operations; and

- split responsibilities whereby the PCSOs will primarily focus on ASB and crime while the wardens will concentrate on environmental management and social inclusion.

The provision of wardens will be more appropriate than the provision of PCSOs when:

- many of an area's problems are felt to derive from environmental management issues; wardens are effective at dealing with these issues, while PCSOs do not have a remit to resolve them;
- the residents of an area are disaffected with the police; warden schemes have a different approach from that of the police and may be more effective at engaging with communities where there is mistrust of the police; and
- there is scope for wardens to boost the linkages, partnership working and effectiveness of local authority service provision, such as by operating as an integrated report function for a number of agencies or to complement a neighbourhood management approach to improving an area.

Evaluation method

The evaluation adopted a two-tier approach: programme level and case study level. At the **programme level** data were collected from all 121 schemes, whilst ten **case studies** allowed more detailed knowledge to be gained through the use of field research.

Data was collected over the period November 2002 to April 2005. The following data were reviewed at the programme level:

- responses to a scheme managers' questionnaire (SMQ), which was a structured questionnaire sent to each scheme within the SWP. The survey was repeated three times; and
- the content of scheme implementation plans.

Ten case study schemes were selected to be as representative as possible of the 121 warden schemes. The following data was reviewed for the case studies:

- responses to semi-structured interviews (SSIs) conducted with various stakeholders including the scheme manager, wardens, steering group members (including the chair) and representatives from partner agencies;
- responses to a resident survey conducted in six of the ten case studies;
- responses to interviews conducted with scheme managers regarding programme resource use and outputs; and
- a log of time spent by wardens of different activities.

Comparator sites were selected for six of the ten case study areas, allowing a **quasi-experimental** research design. The residents survey was undertaken in both case study and comparator areas. This allowed changes in perceptions of liveability to be measured before and after the establishment of the SWP in both comparator and case study areas.