

REPORT TO: BEST VALUE SUB COMMITTEE – 11 SEPTEMBER 2000

REPORT ON: BEST VALUE REVIEW OF PROPOSAL FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL RAPID RESPONSE TEAM

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT NO: 568-2000

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report is the result of a Best Value Review into a proposal to establish a Rapid Response Team which could deal quickly with city-wide complaints in respect of environmental problems such as litter, graffiti, dog fouling and weeds on roads and paths.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- a) a Rapid Response Team is established, as detailed in this report, on a pilot basis for a 6 month period beginning in October 2000
- b) details of how the Team can be contacted are widely publicised to the public, community groups, elected members and Council officers
- c) the success of the pilot is evaluated from a Best Value perspective, on the basis of the extent to which it has addressed the critical success factors set out in this report
- d) as well as monitoring the work carried out by the Team, the evaluation should also consider whether the scope of such an initiative requires to be expanded to include other services not in the remit of the proposed pilot project
- e) during the course of the pilot, the scope for integrating the Environmental 'Hotline' with a similar service being developed by Planning and Transportation to deal with complaints relating to streetlighting, roads and pavements be explored.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The cost of implementing these recommendations is estimated at £61,125 in a full year, and therefore £30,563 for a 6 month pilot during 2000/01. This includes staff and vehicle costs as detailed in Appendix 1.
- 3.2 This expenditure accounts for 0.5% of the Environmental and Consumer Protection Department's Revenue Budget for 2000/01, and can be met from savings on leasing costs within that budget.

4 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

The report impacts on the following key Local Agenda 21 theme:

'Health is protected by creating safe, clean, pleasant environments'.

5 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

None.

6 DEFINITION OF SERVICE REVIEWED

This review does not examine an existing service, but instead considers, from a Best Value perspective, a proposal to establish a Rapid Response Team to deal with complaints from throughout Dundee in respect of environmental problems such as litter, graffiti, dog fouling and weeds on roads and paths in a quicker, more integrated and responsive way. The Rapid Response Team will at this stage only deal with complaints and therefore existing contracts and responsibilities for this type of work will continue to operate until the pilot is evaluated.

7 JUSTIFICATION FOR REVIEWING THIS SERVICE

7.1 The proposal for a Rapid Response Team emerged in response to concern among elected members, Council officers and the public that complaints relating to the type of problems outlined in Section 6 were not being dealt with quickly enough, particularly given the significant impact which these problems have on the quality of life for residents and the image of the Council and the city. For example, the major public consultation exercise carried out by the Council using the 'Priority Search' technique identified 'action on dog fouling and litter' and 'improve environment' as among the top 10 issues which the public felt would make Dundee a better place to live. These issues are also raised frequently at Neighbourhood Forums.

7.2 The Council Plan 1999-2002 acknowledges that backlogs can develop in dealing with such problems due to levels of demand and staff availability, and commits the Council to allocating additional resources to tackle issues of public concern and respond to any drop in performance or increase in complaints. The Annual Consumer Survey has shown a steady increase over the last 3 years in the % of respondents who feel the Council 'listens to complaints' and the Council Plan aims for continued improvement year-by-year. The Council has also established Neighbourhood Services Teams throughout the city in an attempt to improve the co-ordination and integration of services at the local level.

7.3 In general, the works required to tackle these problems share a number of characteristics, including:

- limited range of specific skills required
- little detailed planning required
- relatively low costs

There are, however, perceived to be a number of barriers in the Council's current approach which prevent a quick and integrated response, for example:

- allocation of responsibilities between departments
- public confusion as to which department to contact
- pressure on restricted budgets
- disputes regarding ownership of land and property which can be complex and time-consuming to resolve

- 7.4 The proposal considered in this report aims to tackle these issues by establishing a Team which could:
- deal with a range of common problems quickly without having to refer them to other departments
 - focus on areas which have a major impact on the general public, regardless of ownership
 - be contacted easily on a dedicated 'Hotline' number
- 7.5 The aim of the service would be to deal quickly with complaints from the public, community groups, elected members and Council departments. Priority would therefore be given to 'rapid response' duties, but at other times the Team would take a pro-active role in identifying and tackling problems even before these reach the stage of generating complaints. The areas to be covered would depend on operational requirements, but would take account of views expressed by members, community representatives and Neighbourhood Service Teams.

8 **REVIEW METHODOLOGY**

- 8.1 The proposal for a Rapid Response Team was developed by a team led by the Operations Manager in the Environmental and Consumer Protection Department, at the request of the Chief Executive. All Chief Officers have been consulted on the proposal.
- 8.2 Since this is a proposal for a new service, the approach taken to the review was to establish critical success factors then compare the extent to which the Rapid Response Team might address these more effectively than the Council's existing approach. The results of this comparison are set out in Section 10.

9 **CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS**

9.1 Stakeholders

The principal stakeholders with an interest in this proposal are:

- the general public, including representative groups
- elected members
- Council departments, including Neighbourhood Service Teams which have a responsibility to promote the integration of service delivery at local levels

9.2 Critical Success Factors

From analysis of the views expressed by stakeholders, the critical success factors have been identified as:

- speed of response
- ease of referral
- cost to the Council, and therefore impact on Council Tax levels

10 PERFORMANCE REVIEW/OPTION APPRAISAL

- 10.1 As stated in paragraph 8.2 above, the approach taken to this review was to compare the proposal for a Rapid Response Team with the existing approach against each of the critical success factors. The results were:

<u>Critical Success Factor</u>	<u>Current Approach</u>	<u>Proposed New Service</u>
SPEED OF RESPONSE	Dissatisfaction expressed by public and elected members. Delays affect residents' quality of life, lead to adverse publicity for Council and affect image of city	Quicker action in response to complaints, without questioning which department should do work or who is legally responsible. Also provides opportunity to carry out 'pro-active' work to tackle problems early
EASE OF REFERRAL	Some confusion about which department is responsible and how to contact. Perception that bureaucratic processes cause delay	'One-stop' access to action on a range of common problems via a dedicated 'Hotline' number
COST TO COUNCIL	Contained within existing budgets	Cost implications as detailed elsewhere in report, but would result in greater public satisfaction and benefits arising from improved environment. Also squads need to divert staff from normal duties to deal with particular problems

- 10.2 The review concluded that the establishment of a Rapid Response Team has the potential to deliver a speedier, more integrated service and therefore improve the Council's responsiveness to the public on an important issue.

11 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROPOSALS

It is recommended that the following proposals be agreed in order to take forward the initiative suggested in this report:

- a) a Rapid Response Team be established on a pilot basis for a 6 month period beginning in October 2000, with staff being appropriately trained to deal with a range of problems such as litter picking, graffiti removal, dog fouling and weed-killing. Since the majority of this work is a function of the Environmental and Consumer Protection Department, it is proposed that day-to-day responsibility for management of the Team would rest with that department.

- b) the pilot service be accessible through a dedicated 'Hotline' number, which should be widely publicised. Planning and Transportation are currently planning the implementation of a Helpline and computer system to deal with complaints relating to streetlighting, roads and pavements. It is proposed that the scope for integrating the Environmental 'Hotline' into this system be explored during the course of the pilot.
- c) the effectiveness of the pilot should be monitored in a number of ways including:
 - i) actual performance should be monitored against the following targets:
 - remove litter within 24 hours of complaint
 - remove graffiti within 4 days (unless offensive or racial in which case target is 24 hours)
 - remove evidence of dog fouling within 48 hours
 - remove weeds on roads and paths within 5 days
 - ii) the frequency and nature of all calls to the Hotline should be recorded, with analysis carried out by geographic area, time of day etc
- d) information should also be collated on requests to the Hotline which fall outwith the scope of the pilot project. This should be used to inform an assessment of any demand to expand the role of the Rapid Response Team. Procedures should also be in place to ensure that such complaints are passed on to appropriate departments in the meantime.
- e) while priority should be given to 'rapid response' duties, the Team would also pro-actively identify and tackle problems on areas and routes within the city (to be determined by operational requirements, taking account of the views of members, community representatives and Neighbourhood Service Teams) with all action taken as a result being recorded and analysed as part of the monitoring of the Team's performance.
- f) a survey of elected members and appropriate officers (e.g. Neighbourhood Service Team chairs) should be carried out to assess the impact of the pilot project, and consideration should be given to the most effective way of surveying the opinion of the general public. The Annual Consumer Survey also provides evidence of the public's view on whether the Council provides good quality and efficient services, provides value for money and listens to complaints.
- g) the results of the monitoring exercises recommended above should be used to inform an evaluation of the pilot project from a Best Value perspective, the key aim of which will be to determine the extent to which the initiative has addressed the critical success factors set out in Section 9 above.

12 CONSULTATIONS

All Chief Officers have been consulted on this report.

13 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Best Value Submission to the Secretary of State for Scotland
Report to Policy and Resources Committee - 11 December 1997

Chief Executive

Date

Appendix 1

ESTIMATED ANNUAL COST OF RAPID RESPONSE TEAM

Staff Costs

(including basic pay, bonus, holiday/sickness relief, uniforms and equipment)

Grade 3 Driver x 1	-	£18,744
Grade 2 Operatives x 2	-	£36,186
Total	-	£54,930

Vehicle Costs

(based on lease of 3.5 tonne box tipper)

Leasing cost	-	£3,240
Maintenance/repairs	-	£850
Vehicle Excise Duty	-	£155
Insurance	-	£500
Fuel (based on 12,000 miles)	-	£1,450
Total	-	£6,195

TOTAL PER ANNUM	-	£61,125
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