

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF HOUSING, ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee		
DATE:	18 March 2015	AGENDA ITEM:	12
TITLE:	Neighbourhood Working Implementation		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	Cllr Liz Terry	PORTFOLIO:	Neighbourhoods
SERVICES:	Housing and Neighbourhoods/ Transportation and Streetcare	WARDS:	All
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report details the implementation of the Council's new neighbourhood working approach.
- 1.2 Nine area-based teams have been set up across Reading, responding to a range of neighbourhood issues including litter, graffiti, fly-tipping, grass cutting and maintenance of public spaces, crime and fear of crime, speeding, road safety and street drinking.
- 1.3 The Neighbourhood Teams are made up of a variety of existing streetcare, parks and open spaces, housing, anti-social behaviour and neighbourhood initiative officers. By working together in patch teams, they will be able to offer better customer service with increased flexibility, reducing duplication and costs, taking a 'one Council approach' with a strong resident-focused ethos and a commitment to getting it right first time.
- 1.4 Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Neighbourhood working area map.

## 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That members note the new approach and launch of neighbourhood working.

## 3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council is committed to working with local communities and partner agencies to improve the quality of life in our neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods need to meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents and to be safe, well run and attractive places in which people want to live and work. They need to be inclusive places where local people are empowered to shape, have a sense of ownership and pride, and where residents are able to contribute positively to the life of their neighbourhood.
- 3.2 In July 2014, Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee endorsed 'Working Better with You in Neighbourhoods', which sets out the Council's vision for neighbourhoods, our approach to neighbourhood working and to working with local people to identify and tackle the issues that matter most to them in their local areas.
- 3.3 A number of key principles underpin the Council's approach including:
- To 'think neighbourhood', ensuring that we have a rounded understanding of the needs of local areas and how these impact on each other, and
  - That we take a strategic approach to meeting these needs, ensuring an integrated approach to delivering services across Council departments and other agencies - joining up services on the ground.
  - Working collaboratively with and empowering communities to make the changes they want in their neighbourhoods, to help them develop services and to support each other - to build local pride and neighbourhood involvement, to change behaviour and develop individual responsibility.
  - Targeting and coordinating resources effectively - with more resources focused on those areas of greater need. This includes ensuring that we join-up and have an overview of budgets - and particularly funding to improve local neighbourhood environments.
- 3.4 The Council acknowledges and accepts that there is no simple or agreed definition of a 'neighbourhood', and the local authority's approach recognises that definitions and boundaries will vary depending on context.
- 3.5 'Working Better with You in Neighbourhoods' committed to implementing neighbourhood working - creating new area or 'patch' based teams to bring together all of the elements of 'caring' for the streets within the same service. The aim was to offer better customer service with increased flexibility, reducing duplication and costs, taking a 'one Council approach' with a strong resident-focused ethos and a commitment to getting it right first time. Wider 'virtual teams' in each area would include designated Community Safety, Housing, and Neighbourhood Initiatives officer contacts.

## 4. THE PROPOSAL

### Patch Based Working

- 4.1 The Council has reviewed the way we deliver services on a local area basis and, in particular, looking at how we can ensure a co-ordinated approach to maintaining the environment or 'public realm' including highways maintenance, street care and open spaces. We know that good quality, clean and attractive neighbourhoods can make a significant difference to quality of life and health and could be a major contributor to 'Narrowing the Gap'. A new approach to working has been trialled under the banner 'Love Clean Reading'. As noted above, clean streets and well-kept roads, footpaths and open spaces are a top priority for local people and the Council is committed to maintaining neighbourhood environments to a high standard and increasing the sense of civic pride which local people feel.
- 4.2 The Love Clean Reading initiative represented the first step in creating a highly integrated, neighbourhood-based public realm maintenance programme and the introduction of new technology will further improve the efficiency of public realm inspections, repairs and co-ordination.
- 4.3 Building on this success the Council is seeking to improve the co-ordination and delivery of services at a local level through a new structure which mainstreams and embeds this thinking and approach more widely.
- 4.4 A new team has brought together a number of functions so that all elements of 'caring' for the streets are within the same service. New area-based teams will ensure the effective co-ordination of services for local residents at a neighbourhood level. Each area or patch will have a designated Neighbourhood Officer covering inspections and liaison for all Council land (including Highways, Housing, Open Spaces and Parks). The Neighbourhood team will offer an integrated service response for residents about their local environment.
- 4.5 The Borough has been divided into 9 patch areas based on Electoral Ward boundaries (and current resources), recognising this is a pragmatic approach to locality working. This recognises in reality a best fit "cluster of neighbourhoods". Whilst geographically a much smaller area, the town centre has a designated team reflecting its unique needs and composition.

Neighbourhood Working Areas
Peppard/Caversham
Mapledurham/Thames
Tilehurst/Kentwood
Norcot/Southcote
Battle/Minster
Abbey/Central
Park/Abbey
Katesgrove/Redlands
Whitley/Church

See Appendix 1 - map of neighbourhood areas.

- 4.6 Taking this approach further, each area will also have designated Community Safety, Housing and Neighbourhood Involvement Officer contacts as part of wider 'virtual' teams. In patches where there is a concentration of HMO's and private rented sector housing 'hot-spot' areas, a Housing Environmental Health Officer will form part of the virtual area team. The Thames Valley Police Area Commander is also keen to ensure strong connectivity with neighbourhood police officers, and Police colleagues are part of the overall management steering group developing our approach. Other service representatives may be brought into the virtual teams - as standing members or as needed.
- 4.7 This approach will offer better co-ordination, improved customer service and accountability. Core functions covered by the wider team will include:
- neighbourhood environmental inspections and co-ordination
  - scheduling of neighbourhood service delivery
  - parks and open spaces (maintenance)
  - refuse collection and recycling
  - anti-social behaviour and community safety
  - neighbourhood initiatives
- 4.8 These services together cover the concerns most commonly raised at neighbourhood level by local residents - such as anti-social behaviour; environmental nuisance (fly-tipping, litter, graffiti); grass cutting/weeds/maintenance of public spaces; speeding; cycle and road safety; crime and fear of crime (lighting issues, security); street drinking.
- 4.9 For councillors and residents, existing processes for reporting concerns and raising enquiries or complaints will continue to enable these to be efficiently and effectively allocated, progress monitored and responses quality assured. Residents will continue to raise any public realm issues/concerns through the contact centre, via the web or through the Love Clean Reading app.
- 4.10 The aim of neighbourhood working is that residents should experience:
- only having to report a problem once; the Council (and individual officers) will take shared ownership of problems - residents won't get 'bounced around'
  - one area-based virtual team in each patch will be working together to put things right, building up their knowledge of the local area and relationships with key local stakeholders
  - activity on the ground will be coordinated in a logical sequence - making best use of resources (litter picking, grass cutting and then sweeping as an example)
  - joined up communications and consultation with local residents

### **Implementation**

- 4.11 Restructuring across Housing, Neighbourhood, Streetcare and Transportation Services has been completed, with common themes - introducing more generic roles and aligning staff with new neighbourhood patches. It is anticipated that staff multi-skilling and cross training will continue on into the future.

4.12 Work commenced in November with workshops to introduce staff and managers to the proposed new way of working, and a cross service management team have been planning for implementation, developing systems for new ways of working and training staff in their new roles. The virtual area teams will formally come together from March.

4.14 A Neighbourhood Working management team will meet at least monthly to oversee the implementation, development and coordination of neighbourhood working and the virtual patch teams. This will include relevant service heads, service managers, the Customer Hub manager, the Local Police Area commander or deputy commander and others as necessary.

## **5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

5.1 Developing a neighbourhood working approach which delivers a more customer focused and integrated service maintaining the public realm and managing key neighbourhood services contributes to the following service priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan for 2015-18:

- Keeping the town clean, safe, green and active
- Remaining financially sustainable to deliver service priorities

## **6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

6.1 Our approach will continue to maximise opportunities for residents to get involved and will create greater scope for communities to tackle some issues for themselves. We want local people to feel real ownership of their local neighbourhood - and ownership of the solutions to meeting its needs. Our starting point is listening to local people about the services and issues that are important to them. Working together we can achieve more and are greater than the sum of our individual efforts - sometimes with very little resource but a lot of goodwill, energy and creativity we can achieve a great deal through partnership. While we have a dedicated team of Neighbourhood Initiatives Officers, all of our frontline staff need to share a commitment to this way of working.

## **7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

7.1 An equality impact assessment is not relevant to this decision

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are no legal implications of this proposal.

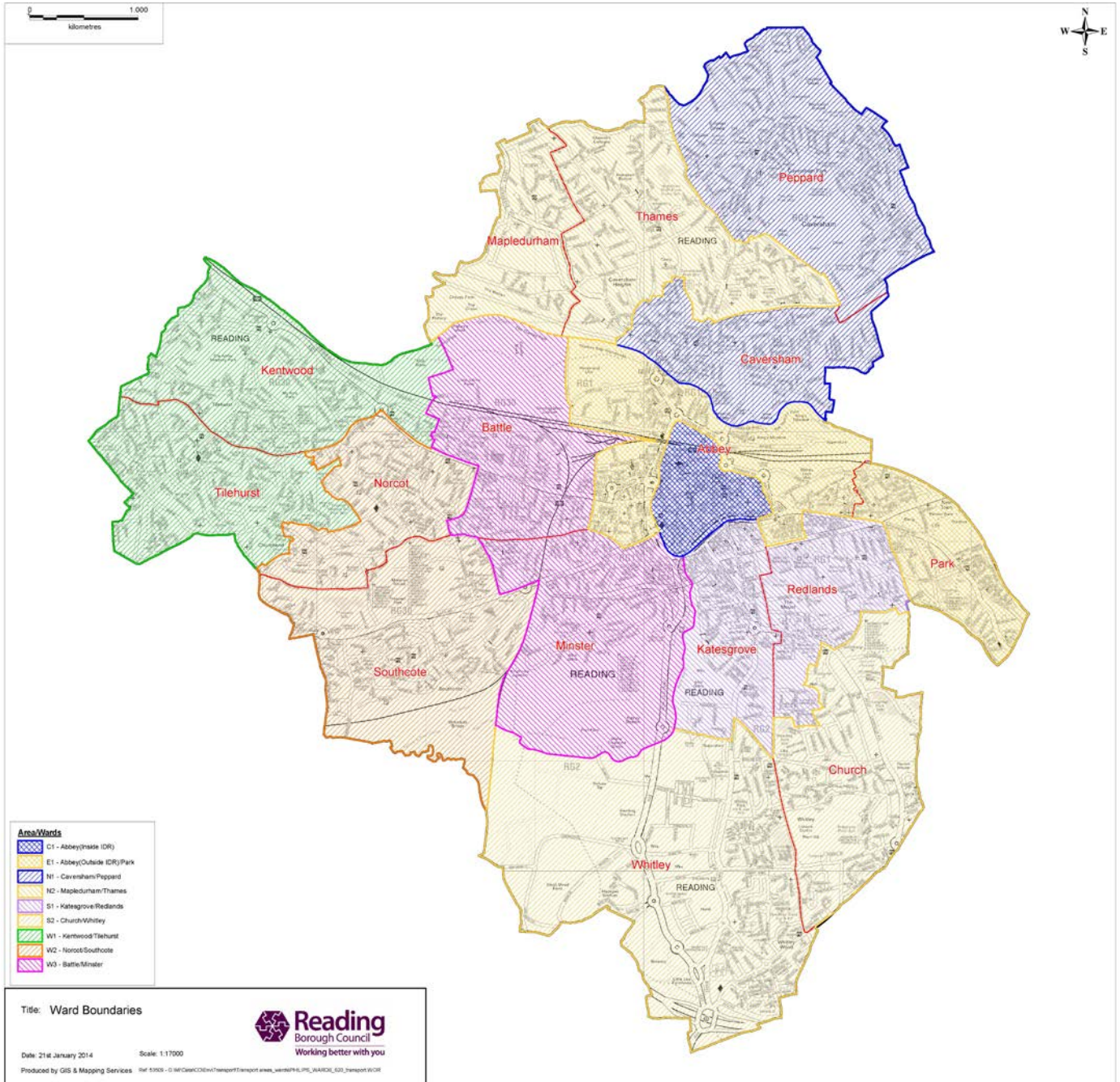
## **9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The proposed approach to neighbourhood working will make most effective use of staff resources at a time of reduced funding, whilst improving customer service.

9.2 The approach supports close working with local communities and particularly deprived neighbourhoods, and therefore the early identification of issues and reduced upstream costs.

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Reading Borough Council's Statement 'Working Better with You in Neighbourhoods' 2014.



Patch 1 - Mapledurham/Thames

Patch 2 - Caversham/Peppard

Patch 3 - Abbey/Park

Patch 4 - Abbey/Central

Patch 5 - Katesgrove/Redlands

Patch 6 - Whitley/ Church

Patch 7 - Battle/Minster

Patch 8 - Norcot/Southcote

Patch 9 - Tilehurst/Kentwood

Team Manager

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