

**UNISON's response to the "Consultation"**  
**Paper written by Keith Balmer, StreetCare,**  
**Environment and Culture**

This response has been produced to highlight issues surrounding the review of the Town Centre Warden (TCW) service and the proposal put forward. The Town Centre Wardens had, since August 2006, been trying to obtain information on what direction the service was heading towards.

### **Announcement about review.**

The Town Center Wardens were first made aware of a review of their service at a meeting held on the 5<sup>th</sup> February 2007 chaired by the Assistant Director of E&C, Irfan Malik. The meeting was attended by the Director of StreetCare, Keith Balmer plus most members of the TCW service and Alvin Wakeman, Control Operations Manager. Representatives from the GMB and UNISON were also in attendance. During the meeting, the Town Center Wardens were informed that a consultation document would be distributed by Keith Balmer outlining proposals decided by E&C Management for the service. The Town Center Wardens were informed that the previous Labour Administration had agreed to fund the TCW service on a permanent basis. The new administration, however wanted to re-evaluate the scheme. Questions were asked about the whole process, most of which went unanswered. The wardens were advised to wait for the consultation papers.

The consultation paper was sent to the wardens and the unions on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 2007.

### **Town Center Wardens and UNISON Meeting.**

A meeting was held on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February 2007 between UNISON and the Town Center Wardens to discuss the consultation paper.

It was agreed that insufficient information was provided, during the meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> February and in the consultation paper. UNISON requested another meeting to be held between the Town Center Wardens, Keith Balmer and Irfan Malik to establish factual information and answers to questions. The Town Center Wardens wanted information to develop alternatives to the proposal made.

UNISON tried to speak with Keith Balmer who should have been the first point of contact during the consultation period but was informed that he was on annual leave from the 19<sup>th</sup> February till the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2007 (22<sup>nd</sup> February excluded). A request was then made to Irfan Malik for a meeting.

### **Town Center Wardens, UNISON and Irfan Malik meeting.**

The wardens were invited by Irfan Malik to a meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> February 2007. They were accompanied by a UNISON representative. Malik responded to the questions raised. However, the Town Center Wardens and UNISON knew that more time was required to pull-together a full and well constructed response to the consultation document. A request for an extension to the consultation response deadline of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2007 was made to Irfan Malik to allow enough time for all concerned parties to thoroughly analyse the situation. The time period originally specified in the document was deemed insufficient for any real ideas on alternative ways of avoiding the redundancies to be developed or if the redundancies are inevitable, to come up with ways of minimising the hardship on my members. The whole purpose of a consultation exercise is to decide whether the needs of the organisation (in this case, Brent Council) can be met in some other way rather than

through redundancies. At the meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2007, an extension to the deadline was requested by UNISON as more information was brought to light. This was granted and the deadline was moved to 10:00 hours on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2007. This was then changed via an email from Irfan Malik to 10:00 hours on the 26<sup>th</sup> February 2007.

### **The Consultation Document**

Another immediately apparent problem was that organizations and council officers that work with the Town Center Wardens were not consulted. This raises a question mark over the true nature of the consultation as a number of internal and external stake holders were left out of the consultation exercise e.g. StreetCare Ward Officers who make use of the services of the Town Center Wardens, schools in the areas of patrol, the Council Control Operations staff who interact with the Town Center Wardens on a daily basis, residents within the patrol areas, etc. Appropriate surveys for consulting on public opinion of the TCW service have not taken place.

The omission of the above stake holders from the consultation is not allowing the strength of the feeling of support for the Town Centre Warden service to be heard. Consequently, Members are not being provided with a true record of the intensity of support for the TCW service.

### **Police Community Support Officers will cost the Council more not less money than Town Center Wardens and the Council will not have any control over their working operations.**

Questions have also been raised regarding the information contained in the “Financial Implications” section of the paper.

The explanation given for the switch needs to be explained more clearly. “The implications for the Council’s budget in 2007-08 will be to deliver a saving of £85k with a further sum of £320k and Neighbourhood Renewal Funding of around £80k used to fund the additional Police Community Support Officer posts.”

Clarification is sought on how these figures have been reached. There is also no information on the exact amount to be handed over to the MPS.

There will be no savings to be made if the budget is handed over to MPS for the funding of Police Community Support Officers.

From March 2009 the impression given is that further cutbacks will need to be made within the Council to carry on funding the Police Community Support Officers at the “two for one” level as Brent Council would now be responsible for 100% of the funding.

To retain the TCW service and provide longer term sustainability, there is a need for additional Council funding through budget growth of £80k in 2008-09 and £320k in 2009-10. These sums are contained in the Council’s 2007-08 Budget and Council Tax Report being considered by the Council’s Executive at its meeting on 12 February 2007. Therefore, it will in the long-term be far more cost effective to retain the Town Center Wardens.

### **Police Community Support Officers.**

The Town Center Wardens have been informed that an arrangement had been made with the MPS to fast-track applications by the Town Center Wardens who would be affected by the proposed switch. Most of the Town Center Wardens, however, made it clear that they were not interested in the offer.

Reasons included the following:

- They would be required to take a pay cut.
- They would be required to work longer hours.
- The terms and conditions they would be subjected to.
- The prospects of career progression within the PCSO service are very limited.
- They would have no say in where they would be posted.
- Finally, the Town Center Wardens did not wish to become employees of the MPS but wished to remain in the employment of Brent Council.

### **Brent Council Corporate Strategy 2007-10, E&C Service Operational Plan 2005-8.**

The success of the Town Center Warden service and how it should be expanded is advertised in the documents mentioned above. What sort of messages is the Council sending out to the community in Brent when the new administration is proposing to axe the Town Center Wardens who patrol the busy streets of Brent when there are currently huge social problems concerning guns and gang culture? The Town Centre Wardens constantly interact with teenagers in Brent. They offer the teenagers advice and information whilst patrolling the town centers. UNISON is of the view that it is essential for the safety of the community in Brent that the excellent ground work that the Town Centre Wardens (TCW) service started and have carried out over the past four years is continued. Brent Council's Town Center Wardens compliment the work that the Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) carry out. Brent Council should be proud of the TCW initiative that was introduced two years ago and agree to continue to employ the 16 loyal Town Center Wardens that are still employed by the Council.

### **TCW service without a line-manager since August 2006.**

The TCW Manager left Brent Council in August 2006. No attempt was made within StreetCare to seek a permanent or temporary replacement for him. Responsibility for the management of the TCW service was left to Alvin Wakeman, Control Operations Manager. It has now been established that Alvin Wakeman did not have the time to deal with the day to day running of the TCW service in addition to his other daily duties. As a result, the Town Center Wardens had no managerial support and more importantly nobody responsible or capable of campaigning for funding the continuation and even expansion of their service. **Bids for additional funding for the TCW service could have been made if they had a manager to support and campaign for them.**

**Conclusion.**

Harlesden, Wembley, Neasden and Willesden Town Centers will be less safe without the Town Center Wardens.

Information on why there is an operational need to switch from funding Town Center Wardens to funding Police Community Support Officers has not been made available. The only reason for this seems to be the “two for one” offer made for the first two years only by the Metropolitan Police Service. There is no explanation of how having more Police Community Support Officers would be an advantage to the Council. The advantage of having the Town Center Wardens is however very clear and has been summarized by the Town Center Wardens themselves in **Appendix A**.

The value of the wardens can not be overemphasized, they;

- Provide a uniformed and visible presence on the streets of the borough.
- Have developed an understanding of the needs of their local area.
- Co-ordinate the provision of local services.
- Provide assurance to local residents.
- Encourage social inclusion and community spirit.
- Reduce crime and the fear of crime.
- Deter anti-social behavior.
- Improve the physical appearance of the streets.

The wardens work very closely with both internal and external groups. Some of their duties include;

- The provision of a high visibility, reassuring and approachable patrol presence in the following town centers; Neasden, Harlesden, Wembley Central and Willesden.
- Assisting council departments and external agencies by providing information and assistance during incidents e.g. the recent tornado within the borough.
- Actively forming links with the community by regular participation in community projects and events.
- Reporting of hazards, street defects and incidents which could potentially be dangerous or hazardous.
- Checking the welfare of elderly and vulnerable groups.
- The promotion of community safety and good citizenship.
- The provision of youth diversionary activities as they have a good understanding of the local young people’s needs and fears e.g. activities within schools.
- Visiting local schools to talk about anti social behavior.
- Information on all the above are provided directly to council officers making the wardens a very important vital source of instant intelligence.

The above are just some of the duties undertaken by the wardens.

## **What Wardens Deliver.**

This is an overview of how the work of the Wardens fit in with Brent Council's corporate objectives. In other words, how the wardens help drive forward the Council's core values :-Service Excellence, Improving the Quality of life, and promoting Diversity/community Cohesion.

### **Service Excellence.**

It is the Council's desire to be accountable to the tax payers by meeting the present and future needs of the community, to provide a service which can be described as good value for money and customer focused.

The wardens are in the forefront of driving forward these objectives. The highly visible presence which the wardens provide during their patrols can be described as the face of the Council in the streets. While in the streets patrolling, the Wardens become at once the "eyes" and "ears" of the community and that of the Council. Through the Wardens, the needs and worries of the local people are brought to the attention of the Council. This is especially true of the hard to reach and sub-conscious stake-holders. Also, we bring to the attention of the Community different Council initiatives which are beneficial to the Community. Moreover, the Wardens are one of the major facilitators of the local Consultative forums, where local residents often air their views. Without this role, the vision of achieving Service Excellence will be more arduous. If indeed, we are the inter-face between the Council and the Community, then we are the team that focus the attention of the council on issues that matter to the local people. This we contend makes the Council's services customer focused.

The Wardens have a highly developed working relationship with other service providers. In short, the wardens are the link between local partnerships that result in joined-up solutions at a local level.

### **Improving Quality of Life.**

The social, economic and environmental well being of the local people is positively affected by the work of the Town Centre Wardens. The Wardens through their high visibility patrols offer a re-assuring presence which deters low level crimes and also reduces the fear of crime.

Likewise, the Town Centre wardens have over the years taken responsibility (allow the pun) for Environmental Management. Thus, the Town Centre Wardens Patrol the major Town Centres in Brent on a regular basis , Observing and reporting all Environmental defects to the appropriate departments so that timely action or intervention is taken. There is no doubt that the Town Centre Wardens have done very well in combating environmental eye-soles like Fly-tips, Abandoned vehicles,Litter,Graffiti etc.

We all know that a run down neighbourhood characterised by Graffiti, Litter, abandoned vehicles reinforce the fear of crime, discourages new investment, and affect adversely the quality of life of the local people.

There is too much to say when it comes to the Environment and the Town Centre Wardens. Broken pavements, Gullies, Fly-posters, over grown bushes, Faulty street lights, damage to street furniture, uncollected bins, commercial waste, Leakages-water and gas, faulty CCTV cameras, double parking or

obstructive parking by vehicles, hazardous chemicals, street drinking, road gritting, damage or faulty traffic lights, bollards etc. All these engage the attention of the Town Centre Wardens.

### **Promoting Diversity/Community Cohesion.**

The Town Centre Wardens Work assiduously to reach hard to reach groups and sections of the community. The Wardens have continually lead the way in successfully initiating delivering projects that forge community cohesion and promote tolerance.

Last year alone we managed several community projects, such as the Neasden Resource Centre (Adults with Learning Difficulties) Christmas Fun Day, other placements around the borough came in attendance such as Stonebridge Day Centre and Melrose House. This event enabled a section of the community to interact and celebrate the joys of Christmas with others.

Other events organised by the Wardens include a sports day at St. Margaret's School in Neasden, a sports day at Copland High School in Wembley, a sports day at The Wembley Youth Club, a presentation on recycling and environmental awareness St. Andrews Primary School in Willesden.

Other initiatives include The Portuguese Business Forum, The National Falls Awareness day, The 4 Bee's – Somali Group, Cricklewood Homeless concern, The New Millennium day Centre, St. Mary Magdalene to name a few.

All these measures initiated by the Town Centre wardens help to bring different sections of the community together and enable them to have one purpose and vision. A platform that brings people of different backgrounds together to celebrate their oneness, which is Brent residents, that is in no doubt a strong tool for promoting community cohesion. Without these measures, a reasonable section of the community would have felt left out.

From the above we can rightly claim that the Town Centre Wardens are a delivery route for a wide variety of key strategic aims. As a council run service we have easy access to the specific resources within the council. This puts us in a special position to solve problems arising from the community through partnership working.

The Town Centre Wardens are indeed crucial to the Liveability Agenda. We seek to apply new solution and approaches to old problems. For instance, with drug users and rough sleepers, the warden's approach would be stressing the health hazards and educating the persons involved about the help and assistance available rather than enforcement, which is the police approach. Likewise in dealing with anti- social behaviour the wardens approach looks at long term solution such as working with other agencies - schools, housing associations to initiate diversionary activities.