

Select Committee on Community Safety and Community Services – 12th March 2009

Report of the Lead Officer to the Committee

Driver Watch – Outcomes of Pilot Scheme

Purpose of Report

1. To inform members of the Select Committee of the outcomes of a pilot Driver Watch scheme involving drivers of Council Vehicles.

Background

2. At a previous meeting of this Committee, a verbal report was given by Phil Harris, a West Midlands Police Community Partnerships Officer, on the Driver Watch Scheme.
3. The Driver Watch Scheme is a crime prevention initiative, set up originally by West Midlands Police at Halesowen. Drivers enrolled as members of the scheme help to reduce crime and make neighbourhoods feel safer by acting as the eyes and ears of the Police as they drive about doing their usual work. Details of any incidents seen would be passed onto the Police to evaluate and take the necessary action. It was reported that the scheme is a passive approach in increasing public vigilance. Participants are only meant to report, and not tackle, crime and potential crimes.
4. Driver Watch members are identified by Driver Watch stickers on their vehicles and receive advice and training in what to observe. Depending on the severity of the incident observed, drivers could ring the emergency 999 number or the Dudley or Halesowen operations desks for other incidents.
5. It is not possible to provide definitive data on whether the scheme has a high or low success rate, but it is thought that there are benefits, such as public reassurance and increased vigilance, in those areas where Driver Watch is in operation.
6. The Committee was informed that efforts were underway to restart and expand the scheme. With this in mind, it was suggested that consideration be given to drivers of Council vehicles being included in the scheme as this would be a major boost to the scheme's effectiveness and encourage local business with fleets to join up.

7. The Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services (DACHS) subsequently volunteered to participate in a pilot of the Driver Watch scheme. 30 drivers (using 15 vehicles) from the Stores and Transport Section, and 52 drivers and escorts (using 32 vehicles), from the Social Care Transport Section, participated in a 3 month pilot that commenced in late October. During the pilot period no incidents were reported to the Police, however one incident has been reported since which the police deemed to be low priority.
8. Obviously, the very low number of reported incidents reflects the fact that no incidents occurred, or any incidents that did occur were not seen by staff involved in the pilot as they were concentrating upon their normal driving duties. It should also be recognised that these staff are performing their duties during the daytime when incident rates are lower anyway.
9. Despite the low number of reported incidents, the main aims of the scheme (to work with the Police to reduce crime and to reassure those who live in fear of crime) remain intact. As such, staff within DACHS are to be encouraged to continue to remain vigilant and to inform the police of any incidents. Furthermore, other Council directorates will be approached to see if any opportunities exist to involve other transport teams.

Finance

10. The minimal costs incurred in setting up the pilot have been met from within existing budgets.

Law

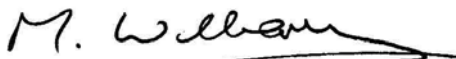
11. Section 111 of the Local Government Act, 1972, enables the Council to do anything, which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its functions.

Equality Impact

12. There are no special considerations to be made with regard to equality and diversity relating to receiving and noting this report.

Recommendation

13. That members of the Committee note the report in particular the proposals for further action as set out in paragraph 9 above.



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**LEAD OFFICER TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE
ON COMMUNITY SAFETY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES.**

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