



Residents' & Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee Review Scoping Report 2014/15

Diversifying the Street Champions Initiative

REVIEW OBJECTIVES

Aim and background to review

It is important to be clear from the outset of this report that the Street Champions initiative is well established in the Borough and has enjoyed considerable success since it began in 2006. The initiative is the largest of its kind in the United Kingdom with a network of over 4,600 volunteers reporting local issues and concerns and, in so doing, making a valuable contribution to the Council's aim to develop a nicer, cleaner and safer environment for its residents.

Given the success of Street Champions, the proposed aim of this review is not to assess the initiative itself but rather to focus on specific areas in which possible improvements have been identified. These areas are proposed as follows:

- § **Make it more easily accessible** by exploring different ways in which volunteers can report issues using digital technologies;
- § **Improve channels of communication** by exploring how the Council receives and disseminates information to Street Champions as well as how Ward Councillors are informed of the local issues being raised; and

- § **Diversify its scope** by developing links between Street Champions and the Borough's Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in order to expand the number of residents seeking to contribute to the safety of the Borough.

The Committee's investigations will sit alongside work currently being progressed on a pilot project exploring the relationship between Street Champions and Neighbourhood Watch Schemes. As such, the review will profit from the intelligence gathered during the pilot and could develop on areas identified as part of this ongoing project.

To meet these aims the following Terms of Reference are proposed:

Terms of Reference

Setting the context

1. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the current Street Champions initiative to include:
 - a. The current level of uptake across different areas of the Borough;
 - b. The volume and nature of the issues raised;
 - c. The remit and accountability of the role; and
 - d. The barriers to involvement and reporting issues.
2. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme to include:
 - a. The findings of the pilot project into linking the Street Champions Initiative and the Borough's Neighbourhood Watch Scheme;
 - b. The current level of uptake across different areas of the Borough;
 - c. A clear idea as to where schemes are located in the Borough; and
 - d. The barriers to involvement.

Better Access and Reporting

1. To explore ways in which the Council could better use its current resources (e.g. its website) to increase the ease with which volunteers are able to report issues;
2. To assess the viability of using new forms of digital media in order to make reporting issues more accessible; and
3. To explore ways in which those volunteers who do not wish to use digital media can better report issues.

Street Champions and Neighbourhood Watch

1. To put forward recommendations on how the Street Champions initiative could be linked with Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in the Borough;
2. To explore ways in which Street Champions could be encouraged to engage more generally in the community safety agenda; and
3. To explore how these initiatives might be linked through the use of the technologies highlighted above.

INFORMATION & ANALYSIS

Following the Committee's decision to pursue this topic as a major review, officers met to discuss the possible extent of the investigation and to develop a plan for its delivery. As noted above, the Street Champions initiative is already very successful and, consequently, officers have advised that undertaking a review on the initiative itself would not be an effective use of the Committee's resources. Nonetheless, a number of significant areas in which the Committee would be able to make considerable improvements were identified. These have been reflected in the information below which has been set out to reflect the proposed structure of the review and witness sessions.

Setting the context

At its meeting on 26 June 2014, the Committee emphasised that it wished to establish the current remit and accountability of the role of Street Champions prior to moving on to identifying areas for improvement and diversification of the scheme. Specifically, the Committee wished to learn more about the following areas of both the initiative and the role itself:

- § How volunteers were held to account;
- § How the initiative interacted with Residents' Associations and existing Neighbourhood Watch Schemes; and
- § What resources were available to provide additional support to develop links with Neighbourhood Watch schemes.

It should be noted that officers are confident that these areas can be addressed without altering the proposed aims of the review as the initiative is well established and has been proven to be a successful model. In order to do so and to set the wider context for investigations, it is proposed that the review begins with a 'fact finding' session in which witnesses set out in detail the rationale behind the initiative, the remit of the role and how the practical arrangements for Street Champions are managed on a day-to-day basis.

The Street Champions initiative is extremely broad and raises issues that are within the remit of a diverse range of the Council's service areas. Consequently, information will be gathered from a range of teams and stakeholders which will be reflected in the witnesses invited to this session. In addition to witnesses sessions, the Committee will have access to data gathered as part of the pilot project into linking Street Champions and Neighbourhood Watch. Although it is unlikely that a complete map of street champions across the Borough could be produced, the pilot project information will be available to assist Members in identifying the current situation and understanding what gaps and challenges there are for Street Champion and Neighbourhood Watch schemes.

Better Access and Reporting

Since its inception in 2006, the ways in which volunteers have reported issues to the Council has changed considerably. At first, volunteers largely reported issues in writing

but, over time, this arrangement has changed and issues have increasingly been reported directly through the Contact Centre.

It is clear that the context in which Street Champions and Neighbourhood Watches are operating is continuing to change significantly with the increasing use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter as a means through which to communicate and raise concerns with the Council. It has been emphasised that, for the Street Champions and Neighbourhood Watch to remain relevant, the Council must continue to embrace these technologies and provide new ways for them to be used by residents and volunteers to increase accessibility and the ease with which issues can be reported.

Consequently, the Committee may wish to explore some of the following (non-exhaustive) areas and assess how they are currently used by the Council and how they might be improved.

- Use of external websites such as Streetlife and FixMyStreet could be explored.¹ These sites provide a social network experience to users allowing them to communicate with one another about local issues, opportunities and share information. The Committee could explore whether and how such sites could be used and monitored as a part of the Street Champions initiative as they would provide a low-cost and ready-made solution.
- Better use of the Council's own website for reporting. It would likely be cost and resource inhibitive to develop entirely new functions to the Council's website for these purposes. However, the Committee's views and investigations into how current functions are utilised could produce valuable new ways for volunteers to engage with the Council and partner agencies.
- Review how Twitter, Facebook and other social networks are used to facilitate the reporting of issues. This could be explored alongside the Committee's suggestion that the submission of supporting photographs would be a helpful facility for both officers and volunteers.

Where there is clearly a need to ensure that the Council and the Street Champions Initiative are up to date and relevant to our residents, it is also important to be aware that there will be a proportion of volunteers who do not wish to use these digital technologies. Consequently, this group should be kept in mind throughout the review to ensure that proposed improvements do not disadvantage them or make their role more difficult. The Committee may even wish to propose ways to enhance this group's interactions with the Council.

Finally, it should be noted that the investigation into improving communication within the Street Champions initiative is not limited to the reporting structures between volunteers and the Council itself. The information gathered by Street Champions also provides valuable intelligence and insight for Ward Councillors on the key issues being faced by local residents. As the system does not currently allow for such reporting of feedback to Councillors, this may be a facility that the Committee wishes to explore.

¹ Streetlife: <https://www.streetlife.com/> and FixMyStreet: <http://www.fixmystreet.com/>

Street Champions and Neighbourhood Watch

As noted elsewhere in this report, this review will be undertaken alongside a pilot project on developing better links between Street Champions and Neighbourhood Watch Schemes. The pilot will focus specifically on carefully selected locations within South Ruislip, Charville, West Drayton and Yiewsley wards as agreed by the Cabinet Member. Pilots will continue to progress throughout the course of this review. Consequently, the Committee will not be asked to contribute directly to this separate piece of work which has a clear set of aims and intended outcomes that will be reported to the relevant Cabinet Member in due course. However, the Committee will be able to use the intelligence gained throughout the project as a basis from which to explore new ways of linking the schemes and how to create such links throughout the entire Borough.

The Neighbourhood Watch website states that *"Neighbourhood & Home Watch is a voluntary network of schemes where neighbours come together, along with the police and local partners, to build safe and friendly communities"*.² This is in line with the Council's vision for the Borough and, as such, the schemes are seen to be a valuable resource that should be encouraged and supported. However, it is known that, unlike Street Champions, the numbers and size of Neighbourhood Watch schemes in the Borough is diminishing which has led to a lowering of the support and resourcing provided by the police and partners.

Given the value of the schemes if operating successfully, the primary focus of this area of the review will be on how to reverse their decline and, perhaps more importantly, to create links and joint working with street champions. This may involve investigating how community safety could be better incorporated into the Street Champions initiative or how the initiatives could be more closely aligned to share resources and information. Ultimately, the proposed aim is to investigate how a new approach could be adopted in order to resolve issues that intersect environmental and community safety matters.

It should be noted that the witness session corresponding to this particular area of the review will be at the very end of the review in order that the information and ideas discussed in the session on digital reporting can be developed upon. At this juncture, Members will be in a position to consider whether any of the proposed new methods of reporting could be used to improve the ways in which Neighbourhood Watch volunteers engage with the Council and other initiatives.

² <http://www.ourwatch.org.uk/>

WITNESS, EVIDENCE & ASSESSMENT

The table below sets out the possible witnesses that could be invited to present evidence to the Committee. It is proposed that witnesses are invited to attend themed sessions to ensure that the three core areas highlighted above are dealt with comprehensively and strategically. Members are reminded that this is not an exhaustive list and that additional witnesses can be requested at any point throughout this review.

Session Information	Suggested Witnesses
Agree Scoping Report <i>(30 July 2014)</i>	The scoping report will be presented to the Committee. Members will have the opportunity to agree or propose alternative witnesses.
Setting the context <i>(24 September 2014)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § Community Safety & CCTV Manager § Economic Development Manager § Service Manager, Anti-Social Behaviour Investigation Team § Representative from the Contact Centre § An active Street Champion
Better Access and Reporting <i>(16 October 2014)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § ICT Service Manager § Communications Manager
Street Champions and Neighbourhood Watch <i>(13 November 2014)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § Representatives from Residents' Associations § Volunteers from Neighbourhood Watch Schemes § Hillingdon Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinators from the north and south of the Borough § Deputy Director, Environmental Policy & Community Engagement
Consideration of Draft Final Report <i>(20 January 2015)</i>	The draft final report will be presented by the Democratic Services Officer.
Consideration of Final Report by Cabinet <i>(19 March 2015)</i>	The draft final report will be presented to Cabinet by the Chairman of the Committee. Cabinet may approve, amend or reject as many of the report's recommendations as it wishes.

Assessment

As is standard practice with a Policy Overview Committee's review, once a report's recommendations have been agreed by the Cabinet, officers will be asked to begin delivering the necessary changes. Monitoring officers' work is a fundamentally important aspect of the Committee's work and, as such, regular reports on progress can be requested by Members and a full update report will be added to the work programme. This is currently scheduled for March 2015 which will give officers time to begin realising the ensuing actions.

Resource requirements

This review will be undertaken within current resources. The plan set out above will be co-ordinated and delivered by Democratic Services and the only additional staffing resources required will be officers' attendance at witness sessions to present evidence. It should also be noted that this review will profit from and contribute to the work already being undertaken by the Council as part of the Street Champions / Neighbourhood Watch pilot project.