

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

21 September 2023

Report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 KCC COMMUNITY WARDEN CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Report providing details about the KCC Community Warden review currently out for consultation, along with a proposed response from Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council.

1.1 Background to the consultation

1.1.1 To help meet the financial challenge Kent County Council is facing, the Community Warden service has been asked to reduce its annual budget by £1 million by 2024-25. To achieve this level of saving, they will need to redesign the service and are currently asking for views through a consultation process. The consultation will run from 12 July to 3 October 2023.

1.1.2 The Consultation document, which is available online, provides information on:

- The current Community Warden service, including what it does and how it operates.
- Why KCC are proposing to make changes and how they have developed their proposals.
- The proposed changes to the service and details of other options that have been considered.

1.1.3 The proposals presented in the consultation have been developed with information from service users and input from staff and partners.

1.1.4 Most of the service's £2.4 million budget provides the salaries of community wardens. To reduce the service budget by the required £1 million, staffing reductions are needed. In summary, they are proposing to:

- Redesign the service, ensuring there is a core Community Warden presence across the county, with teams covering two districts. There would be a

minimum of three wardens per team plus a team leader who will also provide a uniformed presence and work operationally.

- Retain the remit and community-based way the service currently works but cover fewer communities. All wardens will have an area in which they are based but wardens would need to work more flexibly, responding outside of these areas when the need arises.
- Use data and information to identify where to place wardens for most impact.

1.2 The work of the Community Wardens across Kent and within Tonbridge & Malling

- 1.2.1 The Community Warden service was established by KCC in 2002. Today, the service is structured with 70 wardens (including six team leaders), two area managers, one volunteer and apprenticeship scheme manager and one business coordinator.
- 1.2.2 When the Community Warden service was first established, its main aim was to form a key part of the KCC's response to its statutory responsibilities under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (amended by the Police and Justice Act 2006). The service's remit has evolved and expanded from the initial crime and disorder focus and the service now also contributes to their duties under the Care Act 2014. Today, the wardens provide a proactive and visible service that helps in a variety of ways to improve residents' quality of life and allow their communities to thrive.
- 1.2.3 Most wardens are based within a particular community. Historically, they have been deployed in rural communities or areas at the very edge of towns serving a population of between 2,500 and 5,000 residents. The areas served were identified by their community safety issues using crime and disorder statistics, referrals to social services, unemployment levels and deprivation statistics.
- 1.2.4 Today, there are six teams covering two districts each. The service operates with most wardens assigned to a particular area but also flexibly responding to needs beyond this, allowing for coverage of most of the county. The Wardens of Tonbridge & Malling are together with Maidstone, where there is one Team Leader and 13 Wardens.
- 1.2.5 The Wardens are an invaluable resource which is available to the Borough Council via the Community Safety Partnership. At present there are 6 Wardens covering Aylesford, Burham and Eccles, Borough Green and Wrotham, Ditton, East Malling, East Peckham and Hadlow and Snodland and Holborough. There is also a District Support Warden who can go into areas not covered by the area specific Wardens.
- 1.2.6 During 2021/22 (the latest data available), the Community Wardens undertook 1,531 tasks in 2021/22. 30% of the operational tasks undertaken in Tonbridge and

Malling in 2021/22 were general operational tasks. 70% related to work for a specific resident, including vulnerable persons.

- 1.2.7 The majority of the tasks that the wardens undertook in Tonbridge and Malling in 2021/22 were self/KCWS initiated (79%) due to the community based, proactive nature of the service. Members of the public are the second biggest source of referrals (5% in 2021/22). However, working in partnership they also received referrals from a variety of sources, including requests from charities, community groups, councils and councillors, community safety units, schools, and Kent Police.
- 1.2.8 Of the operational tasks carried out by wardens in Tonbridge and Malling in 2021/22, the 457 'general operational' (non-resident specific) were assigned a category. 33% were related to crime prevention and ASB, 26% were related to the environment, 28% were related to vulnerable people, and 13% were related to youth.
- 1.2.9 A total of 1,138 of the operational tasks that the wardens undertook in Tonbridge and Malling in 2021/22 recorded client profile data. Multiple options can be selected for a given task. 35% of the tasks related to persons aged over 55, while 27% related to those with general health needs.
- 1.2.10 Of the 1,531 operational tasks in Tonbridge and Malling in 2021/22, 82% did not require an onward referral. A 10% increase versus the previous financial year.
- 1.2.11 The highest share of referrals for Tonbridge and Malling went to the NHS (20%), followed by Kent Police (20%) and KCC Adult Social Services (18%).

1.3 The proposed cuts to the service

- 1.3.1 As mentioned, most of the service's £2.4 million budget provides the salaries of community wardens. To reduce the service budget by the required £1 million, staffing reductions are needed.
- 1.3.2 KCC know from the feedback they've received that what the wardens do and how they do it is largely viewed as being valuable and effective. They are therefore proposing to retain the service's wide remit and the community-based proactive nature of the service.
- 1.3.3 They are also proposing to retain a presence in all 12 districts. However, with fewer wardens, coverage across the county would be reduced.
- 1.3.4 They are therefore proposing a minimum service level across the county with more warden presence in areas of highest need. The service would continue with six teams, covering two districts each. There would be a minimum of three wardens per team plus a team leader who also provides a uniformed presence and works operationally. Additional wardens (14 under the below proposed

reductions) would be placed within teams based on need using a proposed Geographical Allocation Policy.

- 1.3.5 All wardens will have an area in which they are based but wardens would need to work more flexibly, responding outside of these areas when the need arises. This would allow the wardens to maintain their local knowledge, links with Community Safety Units (CSUs) and community groups, take referrals or respond at times of crisis across all districts. It will also allow districts with greater levels of need to receive a greater level of support.
- 1.3.6 It is proposed to allocate wardens to electoral wards. There is a lot of data available at ward level that can help identify areas of need. There are 271 wards in Kent with population sizes varying from 2,000 to 12,000. A ratio of 6,000 to 12,000 residents per warden would be manageable. This would mean some smaller wards may need to be grouped. To identify which wards will have a warden allocated to them (for both the minimum service level, and the additional wardens), KCC have used a variety of data and information to see where there is the greatest need for the service (known as the Geographical Allocations Policy).
- 1.3.7 The Geographical Allocations Policy (GAP) will use indicators, such as the percentage of people over 65 living alone, the percentage of lone parents with dependent children, the levels of domestic abuse, levels of anti-social behaviour, the index of multiple deprivation and distance from GP, urgent care and A & E to help rank the wards by need for each district, as well as across the county as a whole.
- 1.3.8 Under these proposals 32 warden posts would be removed. The minimum number of wardens per team (three) and the additional wardens (14) would be allocated to wards across the county using the GAP. The GAP is part of this consultation and therefore subject to change.

1.4 What other options did KCC consider?

- 1.4.1 Before deciding on the proposal discussed above, KCC did consider other options and these are listed below:
- 1.4.2 **Making savings by other means than reducing the number of wardens/staff.** The £135,000 of the service budget that does not cover staffing is not large enough for the size of savings required. These costs relate to uniform, equipment, training, and materials. There would be some savings in this area due to reduced warden numbers.
- 1.4.3 **Narrowing service remit.** KCC considered narrowing the service's broad remit (objectives) so that the existing level of county coverage could be maintained. For example, if wardens were to only support the elderly and vulnerable, and not cover safety, resilience or community wellbeing anymore, they may in theory be able to do this over more areas. However, staff and stakeholder feedback in the pre-consultation engagement valued the range and flexibility of warden support,

allowing adaptation to different community needs. They also felt that all of the service's objectives are connected and dependent on each other. Previous surveys of service users and case studies show demand across all the service's objectives.

- 1.4.4 **Moving away from being a proactive, community-based service.** They considered the possibility of wardens being centrally managed and only responding to referrals and requests. This would in theory allow the service to maintain coverage across the majority of the county as wardens would not be based in particular areas. However, staff and stakeholders in pre-consultation feedback valued the community-based proactive approach as it means wardens have local knowledge, relationships and trust built within those communities, which partners can rely upon.
- 1.4.5 **Simple and equal distribution across teams.** Having the same number (or as near to as possible) of wardens in each district was considered. However, this wouldn't take into account the different levels of need between districts, including criteria such as deprivation and elderly populations.
- 1.4.6 **High need ward coverage only.** Using only high need criteria such as deprivation, and not ensuring a minimum service level across the county, would result in the majority of the service being focused in East Kent. However, most stakeholders said that there should be wardens in all districts to allow the service to maintain their local knowledge, links with Community Safety Units (CSUs) and community groups, take referrals or respond at times of crisis.
- 1.4.7 **Reducing management and support roles.** KCC are proposing a reduction of managers from three to one. There is only one business coordinator post, which they are proposing to retain. Without this post, administrative tasks would fall to operational team leaders and wardens reducing the amount of time they can be out in the community.
- 1.4.8 Reducing team leader posts is also considered to be undesirable as they are the key point of contact across two districts for CSUs and they provide close supervision and support to wardens who increasingly work with individuals with complex needs. Team leaders will also be expected to be operational, providing additional, visible uniformed presence.

1.5 Response from Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

- 1.5.1 Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council is very supportive of the work of the Community Wardens and notes the huge amount and variety of work that they do, often un-noticed for our residents. They are working to prevent longer term issues, as well as supporting work to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- 1.5.2 We also appreciate, that like many public bodies, KCC are having to make difficult decisions on cost savings. However, there is a concern that cutting the Community Warden service will lead to increased costs in other organisations and

that whilst in the short term, money will be saved, in the longer term it may actually increase costs such as for Adult Social Care or Policing. There may also be the expectation that Local Authorities will fill some of the gaps, especially in those areas where Wardens will be withdrawn. Local Authorities do not have the resources or capacity to fill these gaps or provide the Warden service.

- 1.5.3 It should be noted that KCC are also making cuts to the Kent Homeless Connect Service and supported housing. These services support some of the most vulnerable in society, and together with the planned cuts to the Warden service, may mean that vulnerable people slip will not get the support they need.
- 1.5.4 It is however, pleasing to see that in the proposals Tonbridge & Malling will still have some Warden coverage, as it needs to be recognised that there are vulnerable residents within the borough who continue to need the support from the Wardens.
- 1.5.5 Members will need to consider how they want to respond to the consultation and a copy of the consultation questionnaire is attached at Annex 1. Members may wish to consider the following options in response to the consultation.
- (a) Members may choose to agree fully with the proposals as suggested by KCC. This does ensure that Tonbridge & Malling will receive some Warden coverage and that those residents who need support will continue to receive this.
 - (b) Members may wish to disagree with all of the proposals put forward and recommend that there are no changes to the Warden service. However, the consultation document does not offer any alternative suggestions, other than the proposed cuts to the service.
 - (c) Members may wish to agree with some of the proposal but highlight the concerns mentioned within this paper (such as the concerns that other agencies will have to pick up the work of the Wardens) and the impact that this will have on these agencies (and on residents).

1.6 What happens next within KCC?

- 1.6.1 The responses to the consultation will be analysed and presented in a consultation report to KCC Members in January 2024 for their consideration and recommendation. Following this meeting a decision is expected to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services. KCC will publish details of the decision on the consultation webpage.
- 1.6.2 Any changes to warden allocations would most likely take effect in Spring 2024.

1.7 Legal Implications

- 1.7.1 The Community Warden service is a discretionary service, which means KCC is not legally required to provide it. It is acknowledged that the service contributes to

their statutory duties under the Crime and Disorder Act and the Care Act. However, they do not solely rely on the service to prevent and reduce crime and disorder, promote wellbeing, or prevent needs for care and support.

- 1.7.2 The proposals are designed to enable the reduced Community Warden service to achieve all it can under these duties. For example, retaining the service's remit and community-based approach makes the service particularly effective in contributing to these duties.

1.8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.8.1 The proposals will lead to a cost saving for KCC but could lead to increased costs within other agencies/organisations who may have to pick up the gaps in provision/service.

1.9 Risk Assessment

- 1.9.1 KCC have carried out risk assessments as appropriate.
- 1.9.2 The impact on the duty by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council to discharge its important Safeguarding role will be severely impacted.
- 1.9.3 The proposed move from one Team Leader and thirteen Wardens to one Team Leader and three wardens covering Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling will severely stretch the resources in place, especially factoring in holidays, sickness etc.
- 1.9.4 There is a high risk of vulnerable persons not being visited and referrals not being made, and these people will miss the care and support they so desperately require.

1.10 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.10.1 Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The decisions recommended through this paper directly impact on end users. The impact has been analysed and varies between groups of people. The results of this analysis are set out immediately below.
- 1.10.2 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been carried out by KCC to assess the potential impacts of the proposals being put forward in this consultation on the protected characteristics. These are: age, disability, sex, gender identity, race, religion/belief or none, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, and marriage and civil partnership. They also examine carers' responsibilities.

- 1.10.3 The scale of the savings needed are not possible without significantly reducing the number of community wardens. Unfortunately, this means that there would be an adverse impact on some protected groups.
- 1.10.4 The proposed Geographical Allocation Policy would ensure wardens, though reduced in number, are targeted to where they are most needed. This would result in some communities losing their warden. However, it may also result in some areas which currently don't receive support, doing so in the future. Therefore, there is potential for a positive impact, although not on the same scale as the overall negative impact.
- 1.10.5 Four groups, older people, females, people with a disability or long-term impairment, and those with carer's responsibilities have been identified as being more impacted by these proposals as they represent the majority of the wardens' current service users. Approximately 80% of the service users are 55 or over and 46% are 75 or over. 63% are female. 30% would describe themselves as disabled. 17% have caring responsibilities.
- 1.10.6 The feedback from the consultation will be used to review and update the EqIA, which will be considered before any decisions are taken.

1.11 Policy Considerations

- 1.11.1 Community, Crime & Disorder Reduction

1.12 Recommendations

- 1.12.1 The Committee is requested to consider this report and the options given at 1.5.5 above, and to make recommendations to Cabinet on the response to the consultation.

The Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

Nil

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