



AGENDA ITEM 11

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

19th SEPTEMBER 2006

SUMMARY OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL'S FINAL REPORT: PARKING ON AND PROTECTING GRASS VERGES

Purpose:

The aims of the scrutiny review were to investigate issues around damage caused to verges by vehicle trespass. This included existing policy in relation to repairs and re-instatement, budget provision, operational arrangements and associated issues.

Terms of Reference:

The terms of reference of the scrutiny review were as follows:

- *To examine how verge schemes are identified and prioritised.*
- *To consider costs of the various solutions and to determine which solutions offer the most cost-effective return on investment.*
- *To examine options for enforcement and to determine the effectiveness of existing arrangements.*
- *To assess links with Erimus Housing and to consider whether a joint programme of works could be developed in the future.*
- *To consider what steps are taken to effectively engage with communities in terms of identifying preferred solutions to verge problems.*

Findings:

Evidence was gathered via discussions with the relevant Portfolio Holder, from officers from Environment and from a site visit , when panel members saw examples of problems and solutions first hand.

A number of key issues were identified in relation to each of the terms of reference above and these form the basis of the scrutiny panel's conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions:

Based on the evidence considered during the investigation, the Panel concluded that:

- 1) The issue of damage to verges is widespread across Middlesbrough. Despite ongoing remedial works, the general level of damage is constant as car ownership levels continue to rise.
- 2) Costs are a major issue. There is no dedicated annual budget and the estimated total cost of outstanding verge schemes is over one million pounds. Outstanding works are currently prioritised and undertaken as funding permits.
- 3) In view of the number of outstanding schemes, the fact that new schemes are constantly being identified and the level of resources required, it is unlikely that this issue can ever be resolved entirely. As resources become available they are utilised in the most cost-effective manner.
- 4) The one-off funding sum of £380,000 from the Council's reserves and balances, approved by the Council's Executive in August 2006 for outstanding verge schemes, will have an immediate impact on the list of outstanding schemes.
- 5) The costs of most solutions used are broadly similar, with the exception of the provision of parking bays/laybys, which is the most expensive solution. The most cost-effective solution is used in each case, depending on the specific nature of a problem.
- 6) There is a need to strike a balance between parking provision and maintaining a pleasant environment, while also ensuring that any solution implemented is that which is most appropriate to local needs.
- 7) Existing consultation and information methods ensure that local residents and affected households are consulted and advised of verge schemes which may affect them.
- 8) Enforcement action against vehicle trespass is taken where appropriate and is an effective means of addressing some parking related problems.

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- 9) Excellent working links have been formed with Erimus Housing and a joint database of outstanding verges schemes has been developed. There is a possibility of Erimus providing future funding for verge schemes as part of its environment programme.

Recommendations:

As a result of the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the scrutiny panel's recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny board and the Executive are as follows:

- 1) That the sum of £380,000 recently provided to Streetscene Services from Council reserves and balances to fund verge repairs be utilised immediately to undertake priority works from the current list of outstanding schemes.
- 2) That current joint working arrangements with Erimus Housing be continued and further developed with a view to:
 - a. Erimus providing future funding for verge schemes which are mutually beneficial to it and to the Council.
 - b. Maximising Council investment on verge schemes by undertaking these, where possible, in conjunction with Erimus's environmental improvement works and housing improvement schemes.
- 3) That discussions be undertaken with Erimus Housing with a view to ascertaining its policy on enforcement in relation to damage to verges and to determine whether the Council and Erimus can take a joint approach in this area.
- 4) That the issue of damage to verges - including costs - is publicised, in conjunction with Erimus Housing in areas where this is appropriate, together with the fact that enforcement action will be taken against offenders.

**COUNCILLOR JOHN COLE
CHAIR OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**