

## **Environment Enforcement; Review and Way Forwards**

**Cabinet Member(s):** Cllr Colin Slade, Cabinet Member for the Environment and Climate Change

**Responsible Officer:** Luke Howard, Environment and Enforcement Manager

**Reason for Report:** This report summarises the quarterly performance statistics in relation to the Environment and Enforcement service. It will also provide vision on service development moving forward.

### **Recommendation:**

No recommendation required. This report is solely for note only.

**Financial Implications:** There are no financial implications as a direct result of this report.

**Budget and Policy Framework:** No additional budgetary requirements in relation to this report. All development is costed within the current budgetary allowance for the service

**Legal Implications:** The Authority has a statutory responsibility to fulfil investigation and enforcement into environmental crimes such as littering, fly tipping and public space protection orders.

**Risk Assessment:** Risk assessments in relation to the role of district officer in place. No further risk assessment required.

**Equality Impact Assessment:** There are no equality issues identified in this report.

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** The service development is designed to align with the Corporate Plan on reducing environmental crime issues within the District. Service development will focus on exploring new ways of working and ensuring relevant legislation is utilised. There will also be a focus on training, technological advancement and efficiency improvement.

**Impact on Climate Change:** The report is focussed on advising how the service is actively working to reducing environmental crime. This will have a positive impact on climate and the corporate strategy relating to this.

## **1.0 Introduction/Background**

1.1 Luke Howard, the new Environment and Enforcement Manager, joined Mid Devon District Council in February of this year, moving from the role of Operations Team Manager at Devon County Council. Luke Howard has worked within local government for 11 years, having initially started his local government career with Exeter City Council. Upon arrival as Environment and Enforcement Manager, it was clear that there was scope to make improvements to the service and strengthen its purpose and understanding.

1.2 Priority was given to identifying key areas of improvement with a view of short, medium and long term strategy. It was clear that there was a knowledge shortfall within the team, accompanied by lack of stationary, which included fixed penalty notice booklets, to fulfil statutory duties in relation to environmental crimes. Two new district officers were appointed in March 2022, replacing two officers who left in February and March respectively.

## 2.0 **Current position**

2.1 The Environment and Enforcement Manager has set about making changes to improve efficiencies within the service, including better allocation of the resources available. Initially starting with the District Officer rota and their distribution within the District. District Officers now work on a timed rota, which allows coverage of the District from 07:30 to 18:30 on the majority of working days. There has also been an introduction of evening patrols of car parks. This provides enforcement patrols of residential permit and pay & display car parks, ensuring coverage at peak times, when most people are arriving home from work, post 18:00hrs. District Officers now have allocated tasks for each given day. Ordinarily, there will be 3 District Officers on duty, allowing for one Officer to be allocated car park patrols, and the remaining two officers having focus on dealing with environmental patrols and investigations. This change has seen a significant rise in our patrol statistics and coverage in all areas of the service.

2.2 The team now have all sufficient stationary required to issue all FPN's (Fixed Penalty Notices) within our remit. There has also been training arranged for the team to undertake a FPN training course provided by Keep Britain Tidy. This course focuses on the legislative knowledge and application of. This course took place on 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

2.3 The Environment and Enforcement Manager identified a significant backlog in relation to abandoned vehicle reports in April 2022. In total, 49 reports of abandoned vehicles dating back to May 2021 had not been actioned. The team were tasked with working through this backlog during April and May, where they were successful in responding to all 49 reports. An active spreadsheet has been created to record any new reports and actions taken against these issues. Since May 2022, the team have dealt with 74 abandoned vehicle reports. Six of these vehicles were removed and disposed of by vehicle recovery contractors, with the remainder being moved by the registered keeper or subsequently being taxed and classified as road legal. An arrangement has been made for an additional recovery contractor to be utilised where required. This has seen significant savings to the service in relation to costs for recovery of caravans and trailers.

2.4 PSPO patrols are taking place throughout the district with an average of 15 patrols a month being conducted in all communities of Mid Devon. Due to the PSPO being relatively new legislation and there being very limited patrols prior to the arrival of the new Environment and Enforcement manager, an educational approach has been adopted initially. This approach has seen District Officers engage with members of the public, advising on PSPO related issues and breaches. Names and addresses of anyone breaching PSPO

regulations are recorded and input into a spreadsheet. If individuals are subsequently spoken to again, regarding any further PSPO breach, an FPN will be issued.

- 2.5 Littering patrols are being conducted in all of our major communities. There will be a review into MDDC littering policy to determine if it meets the criteria defined by Defra. A further review into the proportionality element of our littering policy will be undertaken, this will ensure it is suitable for the Mid Devon area and its residents.
- 2.6 Significant progress has been made in enabling MDDC to issue penalty notices in relation to littering from vehicles. The team now have access to the Traffic Penalty Tribunal who have agreed to allow MDDC to utilise their online portal for issuance of these penalty notices. This has saved the service £6800, which was the quoted cost of having our handheld software updated to allow issuance via that means.

## 2.0 **The way forward**

- 2.1 A review of environment and enforcement policies is being undertaken to ensure they are up to date and in line with the wider Corporate Plan for enforcement. The Environment and Enforcement Manager is hoping to conclude this review in Q3 this year, with a view to submission for any changes to Cabinet in Q4.
- 2.2 The service is now in a position to now implement body worn video (BWV) cameras. The Environment and Enforcement Manager was successful in acquiring funding from the Police and Crime Commissioners office for three quarters of the cost in relation to this. Procurement are currently working on securing these devices via ESPO, and a direct award to Reveal Media Ltd in relation to this. The devices will be user operated and therefore, will not be recording unless activated by the user when engaged in a confrontational situation.
- 2.3 These devices are being procured for the team to enable better protection and security from a health and safety perspective. BWV is designed to be worn overtly, with studies finding that devices with front facing screens are the most effective in deterring confrontation and/or aggressive behaviours. The adoption of such technology for the District Officers is a deterrent measure predominantly, with the capability to record incidents, which could be used as evidence, should an assault take place. Due to the evidence gathered by varying organisations such as the NHS and Police forces in England, it will be the intention for Mid Devon District Officers to have front facing BWV as a deterrent purpose. Front facing screen BWV devices will also allow for District Officers and the authority to be as transparent as possible with members of the public in their use.
- 2.4 The potential of rebranding the service through new uniform is currently being investigated. Having costed the requirements, it appears sufficient funding within the current budget structure is available to enable this to happen. This will provide the team with a new uniform set up which will portray a more professional image than our current uniform.

- 2.5 The recent changes to the day to day structure of the team is already beginning to see the successes in terms of efficiency. The aim is to continue with these efficiency changes, ensuring each District Officer carries their own individual workload in relation to the investigation of environmental crime and dangerous dog reports. During the summer months, a desire to increase evening patrols to tackle local resident issues in relation to parking will take place.
- 2.6 Cleansing inspections have commenced. These will grade the standard of our roads and streets in the three major communities, Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton. These cleansing inspections will tie in with the litter strategy of MDDC, enabling comparison of data in future years.
- 2.7 Since starting the Environment and Enforcement Manager has enabled the team to have a greater knowledge of environmental law, including the application of fixed penalty notices in relation to their role. Carrying this forward will see the service's ability, application and enforcement of littering, PSPO, abandoned vehicles and fly tipping to become more successful and streamlined in its process.
- 2.8 A quarterly report at PDG focused on the service statistics and development is aimed for submission. This will allow for overview and transparency in how the service is performing and identify key successes the service has made.

**Contact for more Information:**

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**Circulation of the Report:**

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**List of Background Papers:**

None