

REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 1 November 2011

Subject: Neighbourhood Champions

Responsible Officer: Brendon Hills Corporate Director for Community and Environment

Scrutiny Lead Member area: Safer and Stronger Communities – Councillors Nana Asante and Chris Mote

Exempt: No

Enclosures: None

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the progress on the Neighbourhood Champions initiative, summarises the points raised at the Neighbourhood Champions Conference and describes changes in principle to the scheme agreed by Cabinet. Officers will develop plans to implement the changes and seek the views of Overview and Scrutiny on the scheme.

Recommendations:

Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and comment on the progress on the Neighbourhood Champions scheme.

Section 2 – Report

- 1 The Neighbourhood Champions scheme was agreed by Cabinet in September 2009 as part of the response to the challenge of improving residents' satisfaction with the Council and the linked perceptions of value for money and cleaner, safer streets.

- 2 The Neighbourhood Champions Scheme was launched and recruitment and training has been successful. At 1 September 2011 there were 787 trained Neighbourhood Champions with a further 300 people having expressed an interest in becoming a Neighbourhood Champion.
- 3 The Neighbourhood Champions scheme aimed to make a positive contribution to the Council's emerging involvement and engagement strategy and delivering the Harrow Strategic Partnership vision as set out in the Community Plan at the time. The Metropolitan Police have made a significant contribution to the development of the scheme.
- 4 In February 2010 the Overview and Scrutiny committee commissioned a challenge panel to examine the Neighbourhood Champions scheme. The challenge panel produced a report of its findings which was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny committee later in the same month and again on 27th July 2010.
- 5 Cabinet received the Neighbourhood Champions Scrutiny Challenge Panel Report at the meeting on 14th September 2010.
- 6 Cabinet received an update report on 18 October 2011, with proposals for changes to the scheme, which are described later in this report.
- 7 The key components of the current scheme in place are:
 - It provides a network of volunteer residents as Neighbourhood Champions, assisting them to be a voice in their community;
 - It used the Neighbourhood Watch Coordinators network as a base to provide a quick start for Neighbourhood Champions and achieved ambitious startup targets for the number of participants;
 - Public Realm and Community Safety teams worked closely with Access Harrow to deliver and develop a synergy with Neighbourhood Champions;
 - Improved targeting of information about the Council's services is available;
 - Improved information about enquiries and the Council's response is available and will be developed further using the technologies now available through Access Harrow;
 - There is a closer liaison between the public and the Council workforce.
- 8 When the Neighbourhood Champions scheme was started the explicit focus was on public realm matters, and community safety issues affecting streets and neighbourhoods across Council and Partner's services. This will remain the core remit of the scheme. A second phase was envisaged, dependant on learning from the first phase, using more sophisticated reporting of other issues, potentially including aspects such as safeguarding, and volunteer opportunities such as support for elderly neighbours, training for sports coaching, first aid, languages etc. This proposed extension received a mixed reception at the time. The September 2009 Cabinet report proposed developing phase 2 after April

2011, and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee offered to provide a perspective on the implementation of any proposed roll out.

- 9 Services in the Scope of the current Neighbourhood Champions Scheme are reporting on the following key local environment functions:
 - Street cleansing;
 - Waste collection and recycling;
 - Anti-graffiti;
 - Fly-tip and abandoned vehicle removal;
 - Parks and woodlands;
 - Public open spaces;
 - Street furniture;
 - Street lighting;
 - Highway maintenance.
 - Noise nuisance;
 - On-street parking;
 - General anti-social behaviour such as drug dealing or street prostitution, petty vandalism and criminal damage.

- 10 Phase 2, anticipated expanding the scheme to include other services in the Council, with guidance and assistance from the specialist services. This phase will require detailed consideration of the roles involved, but officers of the Council and many Neighbourhood Champions are confident that contributions can be made to these community issues by Neighbourhood Champions.

- 11 The opportunities for future development of the scheme could include:
 - Contributing to consultations from the Council and Partners;
 - Looking out for neighbours including vulnerable adults through the Circles of Support schemes being developed by Adults and Housing;
 - Avenues for raising concerns about protection of children and young people to access professional support;
 - Reporting of building control and planning issues;
 - Other volunteer opportunities such as sports coaching, first aid and languages.

- 12 The people who have come forward to be Neighbourhood Champions are a diverse and mixed group. This has an impact on their motivations for being a champion, their levels of engagement and the methods and topics for interaction between the Council and the champions. There is no such thing as a typical Neighbourhood Champion. A good spread across the borough has been achieved, with some wards achieving over 90% coverage. The current approach is to have one Neighbourhood Champion per street, except for larger streets where more than one is necessary to provide reasonable coverage.

- 13 Activity of Neighbourhood Champions in terms of number of reports is variable. Main issues being reported are 40% about highways and street lighting, 40% about public realm issues (waste, fly tipping etc) and 16% about antisocial behaviour/ Community Safety.

- 14 The channels used for reporting are, 59% using the web site, 36% telephone and 5% through e-mails.
- 15 The Metropolitan Police Service makes a significant contribution to the scheme by assisting in the recruitment and training of Neighbourhood Champions, as well as responding to points raised through the scheme. The Police are very keen on the scheme and believe it essential to maintain momentum and ensure full coverage across the Borough.
- 16 A feature of the scheme that has been identified by a number of interested partners, individuals and groups is the issue of anonymity. Due to data protection and privacy reasons the Council agreed not to disclose the names of participants in the scheme. This is incorporated into the agreement between the Council and each Neighbourhood Champion. This is viewed by some as an obstacle to development when champions are not active in letting their neighbours know who they are, and in encouraging champions to get together to share good practice.

Consultation at the Neighbourhood Champions Conference

- 17 To ascertain the views of the Neighbourhood Champions on the progress and potential development of the scheme a conference was held on 5 July 2011. 210 Neighbourhood Champions attended the conference. The participants at the conference indicated that the Neighbourhood Champions scheme had been well received by the volunteers throughout Harrow. Participants in the scheme are willing to report problems on their street and act as a spokesperson between local residents and the council/police. During the conference, the Neighbourhood Champions demonstrated that they have several ideas about how the scheme could be developed and they were optimistic about its future.
- 18 There is a general appetite for developing the scheme further and taking on greater roles and responsibility.
- 19 Three key themes came out of conference for further development:
- 20 **Anonymity:** the Neighbourhood Champions had mixed views as to whether they should be known to their neighbours as some had concerns about how this might put them at risk for reporting certain issues. However, there was an overwhelming desire to work more closely with neighbouring Neighbourhood Champions to share workload and ideas and promote feelings of working together. Many Neighbourhood Champions are willing to waive anonymity with a recognition that there are others who would not.

Current Neighbourhood Champions should be able to decide their own level of anonymity. However, going forward the role should not be anonymous for new Neighbourhood Champions. This would help cluster groups to meet.
- 21 **Communication:** Neighbourhood Champions want to see more dynamic communication with the police and council and want to see the positive

work they do highlighted throughout the borough for example through an award added to Harrow Heroes for the Neighbourhood Champion of the Year. Comments on communication concerned the regularity and nature of information that goes out to Neighbourhood Champions. There were requests for an improvement to the online reporting system. The Council and the Police accept that there are improvements that could be made to the communications with Neighbourhood Champions and in promoting the work of Neighbourhood Champions, and will work on these aspects.

- 22 **Responsibility:** There was a general appetite for expanding the role of the Neighbourhood Champion to include greater reporting responsibility and contribution to volunteering activities such as Pride in Harrow attention to amenity sites. General appetite for expanding the role to take on a wider social element and support vulnerable neighbours.

Neighbourhood Champions do not want to become a “bottom level” police force, but wanted an opportunity to raise any issues that would be of concern to a good citizen.

There was agreement to link up with the Circles of Support scheme. Another suggestion was to have Neighbourhood Champions for local green spaces, parks, squares etc. There was also general agreement for relaxing the approach around one Neighbourhood Champion per street.

Next Steps

- 23 It was proposed to Cabinet on 18 October, that the Neighbourhood Champions Scheme continues with a target of achieving 2000 Neighbourhood Champions.
- 24 It was proposed that the areas of reporting for the scheme are expanded to include those set out in paragraph 11 above. It was emphasised that this inclusion to the scheme would be based upon the development of training which would be made available for the Neighbourhood Champions with the support of professional experts across the Council.
- 25 It was proposed that the option of anonymity is not offered to new volunteers on the scheme, and current Neighbourhood Champions are asked if they are willing, on an individual basis, to waive their anonymity. The wish of individuals to remain anonymous will be respected. The Council will continue to comply with data protection requirements and will not provide the list of participants in the scheme to commercial organisations.

Pride in Harrow

- 26 Neighbourhood Champions are a key part of our emerging community involvement and engagement strategies. Together with Lets Talk they provide residents with opportunities to engage with the Council about things which matter to them in their recreational spaces, neighbourhoods

and communities. There is also an opportunity for Neighbourhood Champions to be the catalyst for practical community based clean up projects with assistance from the Council.

27 Given the scale of budget reductions facing the council it is vital the council develops a successful engagement approach which moves through engagement to involvement and community action. Through Pride in Harrow it is proposed to work with residents on behaviour change initiatives which stimulate new ways of working together to improve performance and satisfaction obtaining maximum value for money.

28 Pride in Harrow is about the Council listening to its communities and leading them. The framework below (figure 1) provides a useful model to demonstrate how the Council will relate to communities and move from enabling residents to engage with the Council to facilitating opportunities for residents to take action in partnership with the Council. The framework provides examples of the kinds of activities which could facilitate engagement and partnership action to secure developing a strong sense of Pride in Harrow. There are of course many other ways we work in partnership.

Fig. 1



Risk Management issues

29 The risk management issues remain those concerned with the original scheme.

30 A risk was raised concerning the security of the participants of the scheme, particularly if they are viewed by other parts of the community as

providing feedback on criminal activities. The Council and Police will continue to act sensitively and will maintain the security of confidential information.

31 There was also identified from research and knowledge of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme a need to retain control of some individuals to ensure that they understand the limitations of the role afforded to them by the scheme. The vetting of potential Neighbourhood Champions by the police and the induction and training element of the introduction of the scheme has been successful in mitigating the above risks.

32 An identified risk is that the take up for the scheme may overwhelm the capacity of Access Harrow and/or Public Realm to respond has not materialised.

Financial Implications

33 The Neighbourhood Champions Scheme is funded through the budget for Public Realm, including the contribution made by Public Realm to Access Harrow. There are no additional funding impacts from the proposals in the report.

Performance

The target for the initial set up of the scheme has been met. The longer target is to achieve 2000 Neighbourhood Champions based on the aim of having at least one Neighbourhood Champion for each street.

Environmental Impact

There are no direct Environmental impacts, but the Neighbourhood Champions make a significant contribution to the appearance of their locality.

Equalities implications

There are no equalities impacts from the changes proposed to the scheme in this report. Achieving a representative contribution to the scheme was a key aim set out in the original Cabinet report.

The volunteers on the scheme are 41% from black, Asian or ethnic minorities (a significantly better representation than found on similar schemes during the research setting up the scheme). 54% are male. 9% self classify as having a disability.

Age provides an imbalance, though not unexpected. The age range is 16 to 86 but the majority fall in the 46-75 range.

Corporate Priorities

The Neighbourhood Champions Scheme contributes to the following priorities:

- Keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and safe.
- United and involved communities: A Council that listens and leads.

The proposed development of the scheme will contribute to:

- Supporting and protecting people who are most in need.

Section 3 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: John Edwards, Divisional Director of Environmental Services, tel: 020 8736 7699

Background Papers: None