

To: Chair and Members of the Operational Policing Panel
Date: 24th November 2011

Executive & Presenting Officer: Mrs Sarah Wilson, Consultation & Performance Officer

Status : For information and action

Mystery Shopping Checks

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the progress of the 'Mystery Shopper' checks which have been implemented as part of the Police Authority's scrutiny of Cleveland Police's customer service and citizen focus.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that:
- Action is taken to resolve the issues with the meeting information on the website.
 - The importance of providing accurate meeting information is stressed to all neighbourhood staff.
 - Front desk service provision is reviewed to ensure that suitable information is available to members of the public attending police offices.

3. Reasons

3.1 Background

The Policing Pledge was first highlighted in the Home Office Green Paper (From the Neighbourhood to the National: Policing Our Communities Together) in 2008 and was introduced nationally later that same year. The Pledge focused on customer service, with ten specific points around access to services, providing information to the public, dealing with calls for service and handling complaints.

- 3.2 The coalition government subsequently decided to remove the Pledge, and in Cleveland this has been replaced by the Putting People First Commitment, which

clearly sets out the standard of service which communities in Cleveland can expect from their local police.

- 3.3 In December 2009 the Police Authority Executive agreed to implement the Mystery Shopping programme as a means of providing scrutiny of the level of customer service experienced by members of the public in Cleveland. The programme commenced in September 2010.
- 3.4 The programme is conducted by a team of four volunteers, including one Mystery Shopper Coordinator, who assigns and coordinates the team's work to ensure that all areas are covered. The team includes a mixture of ages and people from the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and hearing impaired community to provide scrutiny as to the equal access to services provided by the Force.
- 3.5 Mystery Shopping covers four specific areas:
- Public meetings – are meetings well publicised, well attended, and do officers give relevant and professional presentations.
 - Website checks – do neighbourhood pages contain up to date information regarding ward meetings.
 - Phone calls to Single Point Of Contact (SPOC) telephone numbers – are callers treated courteously and professionally, and is relevant information given.
 - Police offices – are front desks clean and tidy, is up to date, relevant information regarding neighbourhood policing displayed, can front desk staff provide verbal information regarding neighbourhood policing, are customers dealt with promptly and professionally.
- 3.6 **Meetings**
Thirty seven checks of meetings have been conducted during this reporting period, from April to October 2011. These have consisted of six in Hartlepool, nine in Middlesbrough, ten in Redcar and Cleveland and twelve in Stockton. Details of all the checks are listed at Appendix A.
- 3.7 Meetings are allocated by the Mystery Shopper Coordinator through accessing the Neighbourhood Policing section of the Force website. Whilst efforts have been made to cover all areas of Cleveland, checks are allocated depending on when volunteers are available to attend.
- 3.8 Meetings are held in a variety of locations including libraries, schools, churches and community centres.
- 3.9 Meetings range from informal police drop in sessions, which the public can attend to discuss any specific issues or concerns which they have, to more structured meetings, such as Community Councils, which are attended by representatives from partner agencies.
- 3.10 Whilst public concerns from all meetings are input into the ward priority setting process, for some meetings this is done in a structured and formal way, whilst in others priorities are discussed but not officially updated or discharged.

- 3.11 Of the thirty seven meetings attended during this reporting period, officers were not present for twelve meetings. This equates to just under a third (32.4%) of meetings not being attended, when they had been advertised on the Force website. This is a slight rise on the percentage of meetings that failed to be attended during the last reporting period (27.7%). The number of non attendances breaks down as follows:
- Hartlepool – one (16.7% of meetings checked)
 - Middlesbrough – three (33.3% of meetings checked)
 - Redcar and Cleveland – three (30% of meetings checked)
 - Stockton – five (41.7% of meetings checked)
- 3.12 Officers failed to attend meetings for a variety of reasons:
- The meeting had been cancelled but not removed from the website.
 - The meeting was arranged by a non police organisation who cancelled at the last minute.
 - The meeting was incorrectly advertised on the police website.
 - The officer was on leave and failed to arrange cover for the meeting.
 - The officer forgot about the meeting.
 - The officer was busy dealing with an incident.
 - The meeting was a joint ward surgery with the local councillor and the officer was on rest days so couldn't attend.
 - No reason supplied by local teams.
- 3.13 When officers were present they were polite, professional and well prepared. Both verbal and written information was well presented, informative and useful. It was apparent that the officers knew their communities well, and were well known by key individuals within the communities. People who attended the meetings were generally very pleased with the actions taken by their local police team, and the police officers and PCSOs worked well with representatives from partner agencies and local Councillors.
- 3.14 Despite meetings often being well advertised in the venues where they were held, local police stations and other local community venues, many suffered from poor attendance. This was particularly apparent for drop in meetings/beat surgeries, where in many cases the mystery shopper was the only person to attend.
- 3.15 The better attended meetings tended to be those that were arranged to coincide with another activity (bingo, coffee morning etc) or non police meetings which the police were invited to as a standard agenda item (Community Councils, residents meetings etc). The only issue with the police attending meetings which were not organised by themselves, is that they could be subject to schedule changes beyond the control of the police, which then led to some of the non attendances. This could be averted by ensuring that in these cases the Force website is updated promptly.
- 3.16 **Website**
The Mystery Shopper Coordinator uses the information on the 'My Neighbourhood' section of the Force website to allocate meeting visits. Many of the non attendances have been as a result of the Force website displaying inaccurate information. Start

times can be inaccurate, and meetings sometimes remain on the website when they have been cancelled.

- 3.17 It is not always apparent from the information available on the website what format the meeting will take. Some meetings which were advertised as drop ins were actually more structured, formal meetings.
- 3.18 Although there is a central Website Coordinator, responsibility for populating the My Neighbourhood section of the Force website, including the meetings information, lies with Districts. Since the last report work has been undertaken to improve the updating process, and there is now a single point of contact in each district who has responsibility for updating the meetings information.
- 3.19 **Single Point Of Contact (SPOC) Telephone Number**
Several calls have been made to the SPOC number to obtain meeting information. Whilst the call takers have been polite and helpful, they have mostly been unable to provide information regarding meetings.
- 3.20 The SPOC call takers use the My Neighbourhood section of the Force website to provide neighbourhood information, so when this is incorrect it leads to them providing inaccurate information.
- 3.21 The new non emergency 101 number is to be launched across Cleveland in December 2011. It is envisaged that this will eventually replace the current non emergency number and the four SPOC numbers.
- 3.22 **Police Offices**
During this reporting period, from April to October 2011, fourteen checks of police offices have been made. Details of all of the individual office checks are listed at Appendix B.
- 3.23 Offices range from large District headquarters which are open twenty four hours a day, to smaller community offices, in some cases staffed by volunteers.
- 3.24 Two of the offices visited in Hartlepool were not open despite the volunteer attending during the opening hours, as stated on the website.
- 3.24 At all other offices the mystery shoppers were dealt with promptly and politely. However, in many of the offices visited front desk staff were unable to provide volunteers with any information regarding neighbourhood policing. Volunteers were either directed to use the website or, in the case of headquarters buildings, to attend a different, local office.
- 3.25 Offices were generally clean and tidy, but many had little information on display. This was particularly apparent in the larger headquarters buildings, which volunteers found to be rather anonymous buildings that didn't feel like police offices.

4 Implications

4.1 Finance

The Mystery Shopping programme is conducted by unpaid volunteers, however travel expenses are reimbursed. To date £1,256.53 of travel expenses has been claimed. Any additional training, website changes or changes to staffing structure which arise as a result of the findings would incur a cost.

4.2 Diversity/Equal Opportunities

Mystery shoppers receive appropriate Diversity training, and are expected to abide by the same rules of conduct as paid staff. The Mystery Shopper team is selected from a diverse range of people to allow scrutiny of the equal access to services provided by the Force.

4.3 Human Rights Act Implications

There are no human rights act implications arising from this report.

4.4 Sustainability

There is a pool of volunteers already engaged through the Volunteer programme, so there should be no sustainability issues.

4.5 Risk

It is imperative that the Authority and Force are seen to act upon the issues uncovered by the Mystery Shopper checks, as poor customer service could have a negative impact on public confidence.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Neighbourhood Police teams are arranging a wide variety of public consultation meetings, which are generally well advertised. Officers are polite, well prepared and professional. They clearly understand the issues affecting their neighbourhoods, and have action plans to deal with these issues. Neighbourhood teams are generally well known to their local communities and work effectively with partner agencies.

5.2 Many meetings suffer from poor attendance, and in a climate of reduced funding and resources some areas are starting to rationalise the meeting structure to maximise the efficient use of police resources.

5.3 Police offices are generally tidy and well presented, but in many there is a lack of up to date information on display. Front desk staff deal with members of the public promptly and politely but are often unable to provide relevant information regarding neighbourhood policing.

5.4 The professional and effective work of Neighbourhood teams continues to be undermined by an ineffective infrastructure leading to inaccurate information being available through the website and the SPOC contact number. Officers failed to attend just under a third of meetings inspected, a slight rise on the percentage

Jeremy Holderness
Acting Chief Executive

Details Of Individual Meeting Checks

Appendix A

District	Ward	Meeting Details	Comments
Hartlepool	Dyke House	Partnership meeting at community centre	Meeting advertised as a drop in but was actually a partnership meeting. Held in an inaccessible location due to building works. Local officer unprepared as only found out about meeting last minute.
	Elwick	Parish council at school	PCSO well liked by parish council and going a good job in the local community.
		Parish council at school	No police attendance – cancelled last minute by third party and website not updated.
	Foggy Furze	Ward meeting at community centre	Good atmosphere with very helpful officers.
	Seaton	Multi agency drop in at library	No members of the public attended, which is apparently usual. Good partnership working.
	St Hilda	Multi agency ward meeting at community centre	Well attended joint Police and Council meeting. Very good communication between police and local residents.
Middlesbrough	Ayresome	Ward meeting at school	No police attendance – officer on leave and forgot about meeting.
	Beechwood	Drop in at community centre to coincide with coffee morning	Very helpful PCSOs.
	Brookfield	Drop in at local hall	No police attendance – no reason supplied.
	Hemlington	Drop in at SureStart centre	No police attendance - Meeting time wrongly advertised on the website.
	Ladgate	Community Council meeting at community centre	Well attended meeting, priorities discussed and updated. Professional presentation by local officers.
	Marton	Drop in at community centre	Professional and organised PCSO.
	Middlehaven	Community meeting at mosque	Very well attended meeting. Well organised officers gave good presentation.
	Park	Drop in at community centre	Very approachable and professional officers, knew

District	Ward	Meeting Details	Comments
			local area well.
	University	Drop in at community centre to coincide with a lunch group	PCSOs well known and respected by local community.
Redcar & Cleveland	Brotton	Ward meeting in village hall	Well prepared PCSOs, very good proactive work being undertaken with local community.
	Grangetown	Drop in at library	No police attendance – officer on leave and no cover arranged.
	Kirkleatham	Drop in at library	No other attendees, this is usual.
	Loftus	Public consultation meeting in library	Very professional and dedicated PCSOs. No other attendees.
	Longbeck	Drop in at community centre	PCSO very committed to the area. No members of the public attended but PCSO attends many other community meetings and this meeting is intended for those who want to discuss private issues.
	Skelton	Public consultation at village hall	No police attendance – meeting cancelled but website not updated.
	St Germain's	Drop in at library	Well informed PCSOs who knew the area, knew the people and interacted well with the community.
		Drop in at library	No police attendance – wrong time advertised on the website.
	Westworth	Drop in at community centre	Very approachable and professional officers. Time on website slightly wrong.
Zetland	Drop in at library	Very good, well advertised, officers expecting resident who had asked to see them.	
Stockton	Billingham South	Joint drop in with local councillor in library	Few attendees, well prepared and professional officer.
	Bishopsgarth and Elmtree	Joint ward surgery with local councillor at school	PCSO well acquainted with the area and the local councillors, very proactive in tackling problems.
	Eaglescliffe	Drop in at supermarket	Friendly and approachable officer. Busy supermarket so plenty of opportunity for engagement.

District	Ward	Meeting Details	Comments
		Drop in at supermarket	No police attendance – PC forgot and PCSO busy dealing with an incident.
	Fairfield	Drop in at library to coincide with Weightwatchers meeting	Plenty of people at the Weightwatchers meeting who come and talk to the local officer. Quiet ward with few problems.
	Norton North	Ward surgery at school	No police attendance – Meeting cancelled at last minute and website not updated. Notice on the door of school.
	Norton South	Drop in at community centre	No police attendance – Joint meeting with local councillors. Officer on rest days so couldn't attend, but usually does.
	Norton West	Drop in at community centre	No police attendance – Meeting time wrongly advertised on the website.
	Stainsby Hill	Community meeting at community centre	Advertised as a drop in but actually a structured multi agency meeting. Some conflict between agencies and the local community.
	Stockton town centre	Joint drop in with local councillor at community centre to coincide with bingo	Plenty of residents at the bingo so lots of opportunity for engagement. Both officers knew the area and its issues well.
	Yarm	Drop in at library	Friendly and polite officers who interacted well with people attending the library.
		Drop in at library	No police attendance – confusion over times.

Details Of Individual Police Office Checks

Appendix B

District	Police Office	Comments
Hartlepool	Headland	Office closed although volunteer attended during opening hours as stated on the website.
	Jutland Road	Well presented office with lots of information leaflets and posters. Very helpful, friendly front desk staff. No information on neighbourhood meetings available as stated these are no longer held in this area.
	West View	Office closed although volunteer attended during opening hours as stated on the website.
	York Road	Tidy area, but lack of information on notice boards. Electronic display gives information but have to wait for this to scroll through. Dealt with politely.
Middlesbrough	Coulby Newham	Very pleasant staff on front desk. Tidy, clean office. No information on neighbourhood teams or neighbourhood meetings available.
	Headquarters	No information displayed on notice boards. Some information obtained from front desk staff. Very anonymous building, not like a police office.
Redcar and Cleveland	Redcar Town Centre	Tidy, clean office with lots of information leaflets. Very helpful front desk staff who provided relevant neighbourhood information.
	Eston	Staffed by police sergeant. Very helpful, gave lots of relevant information on neighbourhood teams. Good displays showing photos of local teams and contact numbers.
	Kirkleatham	Modern building with good disabled access. No neighbourhood information available, directed to Redcar town centre office.
	South Bank	Polite friendly staff, but little knowledge of neighbourhood policing information. Directed to notice boards where relevant information was displayed.
Stockton	Billingham	Helpful staff who obtained relevant neighbourhood information. Very clean and tidy office. Well run and informative office.
	Headquarters	Dealt with promptly by polite member of staff. No information on neighbourhood teams or neighbourhood meetings available.
	Thornaby	Staffed by police officer. Very helpful, gave lots of relevant information on neighbourhood teams. Lots of leaflets and posters with neighbourhood information.

District	Police Office	Comments
	Yarm	Newly seconded front desk staff who had very little information on neighbourhood policing. Some information on neighbourhood meetings displayed in window. No disabled access as in old building, but outside bell.