

**To: Chair and Members of the Operational Policing Panel**  
**Date: 26<sup>th</sup> May 2011**

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

Status : For information and action

## **Mystery Shopping – Scrutiny of Policing Pledge**

### **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:
- Immediate action is taken to resolve the issues with the meeting information on the website.
  - Training is provided promptly to Control Room call takers covering how to locate neighbourhood information.
  - The intranet based Public Consultation Form process is reviewed.

### **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- 3.2 The coalition government subsequently decided to remove the Pledge, and in Cleveland this has been replaced by the Putting People First Commitment, which clearly sets out the standard of service which communities in Cleveland can expect from their local police.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 five 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**  
To date sixty five checks of meetings have been conducted – nine in Hartlepool, thirteen in Middlesbrough, twenty one in Redcar and Cleveland and twenty two in Stockton. Details of the forty seven checks conducted since the last report in November 2010 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, and as most have daytime commitments some areas have been difficult to cover due to the lack of evening meetings. This has been particularly apparent in Hartlepool where the majority of meetings are in the daytime, and where efforts have been made to rationalise the meeting structure due to lack of public attendance at meetings.
- 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 forty seven meetings attended during this reporting period, officers were not present for thirteen meetings. This equates to just over a quarter (27.7%) of meetings not being attended, when they had been advertised on the Force website. This is the same percentage of meetings that failed to be attended as in the previous report. The number of 'No shows' breaks down as follows:
- Hartlepool – three (50% of meetings checked)
  - Middlesbrough – one (12.5% of meetings checked)
  - Redcar and Cleveland – five (31.5% of meetings checked)
  - Stockton – four (23.5% 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. In some cases venue staff had been informed of the cancellation but did not update members of the public.
  - 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 forgot about the meeting.
  - The officer had to attend hospital.
  - The officer arrived late due to traffic.
  - The officer attended on the wrong date.
  - The meeting was removed from the website on the day of the meeting.
  - 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. As a result of comments from the mystery shoppers two officers were put forward as entries to the Cleveland Neighbourhood Policing Awards.
- 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, and in some cases the only person ever to have attended.
- 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

3.16 The information collected through neighbourhood meetings is collated centrally through Public Consultation Forms, which officers should complete after each meeting attended, and which are then uploaded to the Force intranet. This process is in place to allow a corporate overview of local priorities to be obtained, however no department is currently responsible for analysing the information obtained through the forms. Of the forty seven meetings checked during this reporting period, only eleven had submitted Public Consultation Forms. These were predominantly from Stockton and Redcar and Cleveland Districts.

3.17 **Website**

The Mystery Shopper Coordinator uses the information on the 'My Neighbourhood' section of the Force website to allocate meeting visits. Many of the 'no shows' have been as a result of the Force website displaying inaccurate information. Start times can be inaccurate, meetings remain on the website when they have been cancelled and in some cases meetings are advertised which the local teams are unaware of.

3.18 It is not always apparent from the information available on the website what format the meeting will take. In one case this led to a mystery shopper attempting to observe a meeting which was of a closed nature. Procedures have now been put in place to ensure that this does not occur in the future, but it would be beneficial to members of the public if a clear explanation of what format the meeting will take is provided on the website.

3.19 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. In Middlesbrough and Hartlepool the work is undertaken by the Research and Quality Coordinator, and this is now part of their role description. In Redcar and Cleveland the work is undertaken by a part time police officer, with secondary cover from the Research and Quality Coordinator. In Stockton the updates continue to be made by a variety of police officers.

3.20 Since the last report the website has been updated to now remove meetings the day after they occur to avoid confusion – previously this had occurred on the day of the meeting.

3.21 **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 and in some cases have transferred the mystery shoppers to another number for them to then be told that they should dial the SPOC number.

- 3.22 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.
- 3.23 **Police Offices**  
To date eleven checks of police offices have been made. Details of all of the individual office checks are listed at Appendix B.
- 3.24 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 The office in Dyke House, Hartlepool is not currently open to the public due to building works, so the mystery shopper was unable to gain access. The Force website has since been updated to reflect this.
- 3.25 At all other offices the mystery shoppers were dealt with promptly, politely and professionally. Offices were generally clean and tidy, with up to date notice boards where applicable – for larger stations it would not be appropriate to display neighbourhood information due to the large number of neighbourhoods covered.
- 3.26 There were issues with disabled access to some offices, but work was planned to rectify this or other procedures were in place to deal with disabled members of the public.

## **4 Implications**

### **4.1 Finance**

The Mystery Shopping programme is conducted by unpaid volunteers, however travel expenses are reimbursed. To date £668.09 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**

The Volunteer programme receives a steady stream of applications, 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, with up to date information displayed where applicable. Front desk staff deal with members of the public promptly, politely and professionally. Where issues with disabled access are apparent work is planned to rectify this or other procedures are in place.
- 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 over a quarter of meetings inspected, as they had for the previous report. Failure to rectify this could lead to a detrimental effect on public confidence and public engagement with local policing teams.

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## Details Of Individual Meeting Checks

## Appendix A

District	Ward	Meeting Details	Comments
Hartlepool	Burn Valley	Residents meeting at community hall	NO SHOW – no reason supplied by local team. Volunteer checked meeting time on SPOC number before attending.
	Dyke House	Public meeting at quoits club	NO SHOW – Housing Hartlepool meeting, cancelled at last minute, unable to update website due to staff sickness.
	Fens	Residents meeting in community centre	Established community meeting, councillor also attends. PCSO attended in her own time, very well liked in community.
	Hart	Residents meeting at church hall	Well attended meeting. Concerns over spending cuts.
	Rift House	Ward meeting in public house	NO SHOW – no reason supplied by local team.
	St Hilda	Estate forum in community centre	No officer present as no policing matters on agenda. Multi agency meeting. Residents happy with police.
Middlesbrough	Acklam	Drop in at library	Coincides with well attended coffee morning. Wrong time advertised on Force website.
	Beckfield	Residents meeting in community centre	Well attended meeting. PCSO arrived late missing slot on agenda.
	Clairville	Ward meeting in community centre	Officer was very sympathetic to local issues, but confidence in policing was low in the area.
	Ladgate	Drop in at library	NO SHOW – advertised incorrectly on website.
	Linthorpe	Ward surgery in meeting house	Councillor present but no police. Councillor gave good feedback of local police.
	North Ormesby & Brambles Farm	Ward meeting at community centre	Joint Councillor and Police drop in held alongside bingo to maximise attendance. Very well attended, local team well known in community.
	Nunthorpe	Community Council at school	Well attended established community meeting. Very impressed with officers and their grasp of local issues. Officers well respected by community.

<b>District</b>	<b>Ward</b>	<b>Meeting Details</b>	<b>Comments</b>
	Pallister	Residents meeting	Professional meeting. Multi agency walkabout held on a regular basis. Very effective.
Redcar & Cleveland	Brotton	Ward priority meeting at community hall	Officers have good relationship with public members.
	Dormanstown	Drop in at library	Very good and approachable PCSO.
		Drop in at library	NO SHOW – meeting cancelled due to police operation. Library staff informed but meeting still on website and advertised in library.
	Eston	Ward surgery in community centre	Well advertised and local residents all seem aware of local team. Very proactive dealing with local issues.
		Ward surgery in village hall	No residents attended. Officer very friendly with good local knowledge.
	Grangetown	Beat surgery in community centre	Volunteer was first person ever to attend.
	Guisborough	Drop in at church	NO SHOW – PCSO had to attend hospital.
	Hutton	Drop in at community centre	NO SHOW – PCSO forgot about meeting.
	Kirkleatham	Drop in at library	NO SHOW – Officers attended on wrong date.
	Newcomen	Policing priority meeting in church hall	Good relationships with local councillors and residents.
	Ormesby	Drop in at library	NO SHOW – team arrived late due to traffic. Library staff informed but didn't pass on message.
	Saltburn	Drop in at church hall	Drop in to coincide with coffee morning. Local team well known in area. Well attended meeting.
	Skelton	Public meeting in village hall	Well attended structured meeting. Local team known to community, very conscientious and helpful PCSO.
	Westworth	Ward meeting in community centre	Wrong time advertised on website. Officer was polite and helpful.
		Young persons meeting in community centre	Normally well attended but many on school trip this meeting. Very good rapport with local young people.
Zetland	Ward surgery in library	Not well attended but PCSO makes effort to chat to people in library and staff.	

<b>District</b>	<b>Ward</b>	<b>Meeting Details</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Stockton	Billingham Central	Drop in at community centre	Closed meeting not suitable for observation.
	Billingham West	Ward surgery in community centre	Some attendees.
	Fairfield	Drop in at school	Volunteer was first person ever to attend.
		Drop in at library	Polite well prepared officer.
	Grangefield	Drop in at community centre	Volunteer was first person ever to attend.
	Hartburn	Ward surgery at community centre	Joint ward surgery with local Councillors. Not traditionally well attended but several people present for this meeting. Very impressed with local officer.
	Hardwick	Residents meeting at community centre	NO SHOW – meeting cancelled last minute by venue key holder
		Residents meeting at community centre	Well attended multi agency meeting. Officers are aware of local issues and have plans in place to deal with them.
	Newtown	Residents meeting at church hall	Wrong time advertised on Force website due to last minute time change by non police Chair. PCSO attended although off duty. Very well liked within community.
	Norton North	Ward surgery at library	Multi agency ward surgery. Very approachable officer.
	Norton South	Beat surgery at community centre	Very productive, well attended multi agency meeting.
	Parkfield & Oxbridge	Cuppa with a coppa in sheltered housing	NO SHOW – mistake on Force website.
	Roseworth	Ward surgery in community centre	Joint meeting with Councillor, but PCSO unable to attend due to shift pattern. No public present.
	Stainsby Hill	Beat surgery at library	Volunteer was only attendee. PCSO was professional and dedicated.
Western Parishes	Drop in at community centre	2 PCSOs, well prepared with fact sheet. Two local residents attended, whose problems were dealt with.	
	Ward meeting at community	NO SHOW – removed from website on the day of the	

<b>District</b>	<b>Ward</b>	<b>Meeting Details</b>	<b>Comments</b>
		centre	meeting.
	Yarm	Drop in at library	NO SHOW – wrong time advertised on Force website

## Details Of Individual Police Office Checks

## Appendix B

District	Police Office	Comments
Hartlepool	Headquarters	Wheelchair access but lack of parking in area. Notice boards tidy but not displaying neighbourhood information as office covers all of Hartlepool BCU. Dealt with promptly.
	Dyke House	Office not currently open to the public due to building works. Force website updated accordingly.
	Jutland Road	Door locked but quick response after knock. Appears to be little used by the public. Lots of information displayed on walls.
	York Road	Multi agency office. No information on local policing displayed. Very helpful receptionist. Would be difficult to access for wheelchair users.
Middlesbrough	Coulby Newham	Tidy clean office. Staff had no access to a computer on the front desk so ability to help with enquiries was limited. Covers wide area so not appropriate to display meeting information.
Redcar and Cleveland	Redcar Town Centre	Clean tidy office with up to date relevant information. Window displays also provide useful information when office is closed.
	Eston	Dealt with promptly. Tidy office although notices out of date.
	Saltburn	Staffed by a very helpful volunteer. No wheelchair access currently but work is to be undertaken to resolve this.
	Loftus	Well organised station with up to date information displayed.
	Guisborough	Very well organised – was supplied with a printout of all ward meetings but advised to check before attending in case of any date changes.
Stockton	Yarm	Very well organised and well run. No disabled access but wheelchair users could be dealt with via external phone.