

Environment Scrutiny Panel – 11 November 2008

Out of Hours Informal Scrutiny Group Review

Report of Head of Environment

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Purpose of the Report

The Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider this matter as part of its role in holding the Environment Portfolio Holder to account relating to the performance of the City Council's role in relation to the provision of services out of hours.

Links to the Corporate Strategy

The work in this area is part of the core functions of the Environmental Health service.

Recommended

That the Environment Scrutiny Panel:

1. considers the report and whether the review has adequately scrutinised issues relating to those Out of Hours (OoH) Services which are within the Panel's remit.
2. adds any additional recommendations it feels are appropriate.
3. asks Cabinet to agree the following recommendations in order to improve the way in which the City Council provides services out of hours.

That the Portfolio Holder for Planning & Access:

- a) reconsider the arrangements for Building Control Service OoH and, at the very least, investigate providing cover in the absence of the Head of Building Control.
- b) consider introducing a voluntary cascade system, similar to that operated by New Forest District Council, which compensates staff with time off in lieu, when developing a new system for provision of OoH for Building Control
- c) consider strengthening Building Control Services OoH by making budgetary provision for overtime costs and standby allowances.
- d) investigate the implications of providing an improved OoH Building Control Service by amending the contracts of new staff as they join the Council to include this requirement.

That the Portfolio Holder for Environment:

- e) consider re-establishing the Environmental Health guaranteed telephone response to callers (filtered through Central Control), using the existing standby allowance rates. The system should allow an officer to make a judgement as to whether the call requires a visit and if undertaken this should be compensated by time off in lieu. The effect of this change should be reviewed a year after its introduction and consideration given to the service being extended.
- f) be asked to review OoH Service for Stray Dogs with a view to providing a more local kennel facility.
- g) investigate the option of delegating limited TPO powers to Parish Councils and consider what alternative steps could be taken in the unparished area of Winchester town.
- h) Consider providing a guaranteed telephone response to callers (filtered through Central Control) for Tree Preservation Order Emergencies with officers able to make a judgement as to whether the call required a visit and compensated by time off in lieu if this occurs.

Executive Summary

This report describes the work and conclusions of the Informal Scrutiny Group set up by the Environment Scrutiny Panel in order to review the City Council's provision of OoH Services.

The provision of OoH services affects a number of City Council responsibilities and the level of cover provided varies depending upon whether resources are available to fund a standby system or whether the service relies on the goodwill of staff to be contacted and respond if possible.

This review has considered each service in detail as well as looking at peripheral implications such as personnel, legal, risk and external scrutiny issues.

The review has concluded that there are improvements which should be investigated and implemented and these are set out in detail within the report.

Background Documents

Working documents held in the Environment Division.

Appendices

Appendix: Out of Hours Informal Scrutiny Group Report



Winchester
City Council

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

REPORT EN 69

11 November 2008

**Report by the Chairman,
Councillor Barry Lipscomb**

**OUT OF HOURS
SERVICES**

SCRUTINY REVIEW – OUT OF HOURS SERVICES

REPORT OF OoH INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Informal Scrutiny Group was set up by the Environment Scrutiny Panel in order to review the City Council's input into the delivery of Out of Hours (OoH) Services within the ESP responsibilities for scrutiny. Its Members were Councillors Lipscomb, Clear, Bell, Mather and Howell; the ISG Members elected Cllr Lipscomb as their Chairman.

2. Background to the Study

- 2.1 The City Council has differing arrangements for the 'delivery' of OoH services ranging from informal contact systems to formal standby arrangements, depending upon the service involved and budget available. The level of service provided has reduced in some cases as a result of previous budget savings.
- 2.2 The aim of the study is to review the current arrangements and make sure that they are fit for purpose for current demands and expectations.

3. Terms of Reference

- 3.1 At its inaugural meeting the ISG considered draft terms of reference and agreed these as being to

- a) **review the existing arrangements for the provision of services outside of normal working hours**
- b) **consider which services scrutinised by the Environment Scrutiny Panel should be considered for the provision of OoH services including legal obligations and expectations based on a risk based approach**
- c) **review WCC OoH arrangements against other authorities within Hampshire**
- d) **develop a proposal for the revision of OoH services provided by WCC if this is considered appropriate**
- e) **Identify the likely resource, personnel and legal consequences of any proposed changes within item (d)**

- 3.2 The panel met on 5 occasions throughout September and October and interviewed the following officers

- **Paul Wood**, Customer Service Manager
- **Chris Griffith-Jones**, Head of Building Control
- **Howard Bone**, Head of Legal Services
- **Alison Gavin**, Head of Organisation Development

- **Lin Curtis**, Central Control Manager
- **David Read**, Risk Management & Insurance Officer
- **Andy Hickman**, Head of Access and Infrastructure
- **Rob Heathcock**, Head of Environment
- **Andrew Hiney**, Complaints Officer
- **David Shaw**, Principal Committee Administrator

4. Current arrangements for Environmental Health OoH service provision

- 4.1 The ISG were advised that the City Council's Out of Hours (OoH) Service is provided principally through the telephone service at Hyde Lodge (Central Control), which also provides a 24 hours service to the Council's Sheltered Housing Schemes. The Group noted the existence of additional OoH phone service which dealt with Housing Repair Requests but that this was a stand alone service and fell outside the remit of the Group's review.
- 4.2 The Group were informed that, until approximately three years ago, an OoH Service was provided by Environmental Health officers. Officers operated on a rota basis and were contactable by Central Control. The officer determined whether the call warranted an immediate visit. This service cost approximately £10-15k per year in standby allowances and was dropped as a budgetary saving.
- 4.3 This arrangement was replaced by the current arrangement, which offers a more informal service from the relevant staff. Staff were not "on call" during weekends and evenings etc. but make their telephone numbers available to the operators at Central Control who, if necessary, call them for advice before returning to the customer. The officer considers whether the call merits an immediate visit, for which officers are paid overtime or given time off in lieu. The Group noted that staff at Central Control are trained in screening and prioritising calls.
- 4.4 The ISG ascertained that to change this arrangement to a more formal "on call" basis would either require a financial incentive or an alteration to staff contracts to make such duties compulsory.
- 4.5 For stray dogs, a separate system now exists as the previous policy of the Police accepting stray dogs OoH followed by collection by the Council's dog wardens the following day is no longer in operation. The stray dogs OoH service is now provided by private kennels at Froxfield, near Petersfield. The reason for this was that no nearer kennels were prepared to deal with stray dogs (given the risk of infection, their own OoH provision and security issues). Although the Council had worked with neighbouring authorities to establish an OoH Service, Winchester had been unable to commit to the final scheme because of budgetary constraints.
- 4.6 Members of the public who report a stray dog OoH are asked to keep it at home for collection by the Council's dog warden the next working day, or to take the animal to the Froxfield facility directly, which it was accepted might act as a disincentive to report a stray animal. Upon collection by the warden, the stray dog is taken to the Council's regular kennels at Ropley.

- 4.7 The ISG studied data on stray dog statistics which showed an upward trend for reports received and some authorities are exploring the possibility of partnerships with veterinary practices to provide an OoH service.
- 4.8 Looking at the number of OoH calls received, those dealt with by Environmental Health between 2002 and 2005 averaged 187 each year, with the peak time for reporting incidents being in the summer months.

5. Role of the Customer Service Centre (CSC)

- 5.1 The ISG interviewed Paul Wood, Customer Service Manager and studied the results of a questionnaire completed by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Customer Services Group which resulted in the following findings:

- Most local authority calls are received between 8am and 6pm. The WCC CSC used to open until 6.00pm but the reduced calls received after 5.30pm had resulted in the Centre now closing at the earlier time. Opening hours are kept under review by studying call data. This includes the possibility of Saturday morning openings. A Customer Service Questionnaire is used to produce feedback, which can be used to tailor the service.
- Opening times are widely advertised on the Council's website and in the Telephone Directory.
- Although the OoH service is administered by Central Control, under the management of Landlord Services, PW recognises that there should be a more joined-up approach with the CSC. This might be achieved through standardisation, for example in branding and having the same salutations. There is also the opportunity to standardise technology between the two centres.
- On telephoning the main switchboard number (01962 840222) OoH, customers are greeted by a recorded message giving details of the City Office opening hours, Central Control number for emergencies, contact information for the 101 service for antisocial behaviour calls and general information on the Council website.
- The questionnaire also identified differing ways in which the various Hampshire authorities handled OoH calls. Some have outsourced the service to third party providers whilst some retain an in-house service. All exercise a filtering of calls to extract details on genuine emergencies. OoH calls to WCC Central Control are logged.
- In respect of the 101 service, Portsmouth and Southampton have their own arrangements for making a response. The Group noted that there is a variation in take up of the 101 service between districts, and public usage have not been helped by this together with uncertainties in funding of the scheme.

- 5.2 The ISG gave detailed consideration to the role of the '101' service provided through the Police for reporting of OoH complaints. These complaints are passed onto the Customer Service Centre immediately, although they are not considered until staff CSC staff return to work.
- 5.3 Since the introduction of the 101 service the number of calls on environmental health related matters has increased. The number of 101 calls received for the Winchester district for the period from January 2008 to date was 1290. Of these 463 (35%) were noise complaints; 36% related to rowdy and intimidating behaviour; 7% vehicle nuisance; 5% (59) fly tipping and 4% (47) vandalism. The remaining calls were due to domestic nuisance.
- 5.4 The ISG questioned the benefit of the 101 service and were advised that the calls are recorded in terms of category and postcode and the collected data used by the Police and our own antisocial behaviour team to identify, for example, anti social behaviour hotspots where police can prioritise their beats.
- 5.5 Insofar as the future is concerned, funding for the 101 service will continue until April 2009 but after that the apportionment of running costs between the local authorities was still to be decided if it was agreed that the service is to continue.

6. Role of Central Control

- 6.1 The ISG interviewed Lin Curtis, Central Control Manager, who confirmed that they primarily look after the Council's Sheltered Housing throughout the day, via the lifeline and telecare systems, in addition to some private schemes. During OoH, all calls to the Council are transferred to Central Control. These include dealing with:
- Emergency maintenance for Council tenants
 - Dogs and cats
 - Noise
 - Rubbish
 - Serco calls
 - Parking (i.e. cars trapped in the Brooks Car Park, which is locked during the evenings)
 - Homelessness (referred either to the Homelessness Officer or the Police)
 - Highways
 - Planning matters
 - Lone working contact for officers who are on site OoH
 - The fire alarm at Sussex Street hostel
 - Sewage and flooding
 - Building Control
 - Councillors' information
 - Media enquiries
 - Business continuity and the emergency plan

6.2 One person would be on duty during OoH working shifts of 8am-3pm, 3pm-10pm or 10pm-8pm and receives 3-4 calls a day – most of which are at the weekends. From a typical month, May 2008, Central Control receive:

- 13 calls on cats and dogs
- 3 on pest control
- 2 on noise
- 5 on rubbish
- 1 on parking
- 3 on highways
- 8 miscellaneous

6.3 The ISG were advised that staff are trained to deal with difficult callers and that it was rare that they are unable to contact an officer when a response is warranted. It was also agreed that the role of Central Control might be improved by the supply of information from relevant departments of events that are likely to take place during OoH (for example, if the Council had granted permission for a tree to be felled)

7. Building Control

7.1 Chris Griffith-Jones (C G-J), Head of Building Control was interviewed to consider the current position for that service. He advised that no Building Control staff have terms of employment that stipulate that they should provide an OoH service. If he was personally called out, or if another member of his staff is called upon to provide an OoH service, then time off in lieu is the only recompense as compared to some other councils who offer overtime payments.

7.2 In the event of an OoH call a visit is made by C G-J to assess the situation and, if appropriate, Serco called out to provide barriers to seal off any hazard. If necessary he can order a danger to be removed as this decision must be made by a qualified Building Control surveyor so that any costs incurred can be recovered from the owner. Occasionally calls are received from Fire and Rescue or the Police to ensure the safety of a building prior to the gathering of forensic information. If C G-J is available then a response will be provided. If it is appropriate the Fire Service Urban Search and Rescue can be called to stabilise a scene but this is not a primary role for them.

7.3 It is estimated that approximately 6 OoH calls are received each year. Officers in the Building Control Team also make informal observations of possible hazards as part of their routine travels. If a hazard is observed, for example with Network Rail hoardings, then the Council can act as a coordinator to broker a repair. As a last resort the Council can serve a Dangerous Structures Notice. A store of stakes and warning tape is also kept at Central Control which could be used to cordon off a dangerous structure if required.

8. Engineering Issues

- 8.1 The ISG interviewed Andy Hickman, Head of Access and Infrastructure regarding provision for dealing with engineering emergencies OoH. He explained that there is a separate and formalised arrangement to provide OoH Access and Infrastructure Services.
- 8.2 The service monitors the 40 sewage treatment works that are run by the Council. Officers on call are expected to check a computer system twice a day to ensure that the systems are running satisfactorily. A risk assessment had highlighted that the sewage system has at least 12 hours spare capacity, so it only requires monitoring out of hours at the weekends. If required, they are paid travel expenses to attend the site. The Council's standard standby allowances are paid which are:
- Saturdays and Sundays £49.53 per day
 - Public Holidays £99.06 per day

The call-out system rotated amongst three staff members.

- 8.3 The service has recently been expanded to include responsibility for rivers in the Winchester town area (following a call from the Environment Agency via Central Control). The Environment Agency has electronic sensors to monitor the height of the rivers throughout the town.
- 8.4 Access and Infrastructure staff also receive OoH calls (from Central Control) regarding car parking issues, which relate mainly to releasing cars from the locked Brooks Car Park. In this respect it was noted that car park barriers are operated OoH by the CCTV staff.
- 8.5 ISG members discussed the possible duplication of OoH services between Central Control and the CCTV operators. It was noted that, for technical reasons, it will not be possible to relocate Central Control from Hyde Lodge to the new CCTV site at Winnall. Furthermore, it was noted that the CCTV operators would be distracted from their main task of monitoring the screens if they took on some of Central Control's tasks and there was an issue of training the operatives to deal with the wide range of calls received by Central Control.

9. Emergency Planning Issues

- 9.1 The ISG considered the provision of OoH services in relation to the City Council's duties under the Civil Contingencies Act. They were advised that Emergency Planning calls for assistance are usually generated by blue light services that require support from the local authority. In such a situation, the blue light services will call the Hampshire County Council duty officer by pager, text or mobile phone. The Duty Officer was on a 24 hour rota system.
- 9.2 The HCC Duty Officer can call out WCC's Chief Executive (CX) (or other Controller) as set out in The Emergency Response Plan. If no initial contact is made, then Central Control is called. Central Control provide a resilience out of hours emergency contact number between 5.30pm and 8.00am and will ring

the other Controllers in the following order: CX, Alison Gavin, Bob Merrett, Steve Tilbury and Stephen Whetnall. If no Controllers can be contacted, then Coordinators are called. On taking the call the Controller establishes key information relating to the incident and assesses the resources required.

- 9.3 The principal questions to be answered following a call are whether there is a need to set up the Emergency Control Centre, a Rest Centre, to send a district liaison officer to the scene and to send an officer to the multi agency control. Once this decision is made the controller calls the Link person (Howard Bone, Chris Ashcroft or Dave Shaw or Central Control if no one can be contacted) who contacts the officers in the Plan to provide the correct response as identified by the Controller.
- 9.4 The ISG were advised that Officers' involvement in the Plan was voluntary and no person in the plan is paid on a retainer basis. There is no rota system, except for Controllers over bank holidays including Easter, Christmas and New Year. If a call out occurs and payments need to be made, then these are paid from existing staffing budgets.
- 9.5 In studying neighbouring authorities, Test Valley has contracted their OoH calls to Invicta Telecare. If the call requires an emergency response they operate a telephone cascade system. They have standby arrangements for Christmas and New Year, and staff on standby during these periods are paid an honorarium. If they are called out, then normal out of hours payments are made in accordance with their normal arrangements.

At New Forest OoH calls went to Tunstall at Doncaster. They also operate a cascade system on receiving a call. No call-out payments are made.

10. Legal responsibilities and duty of care

- 10.1 Howard Bone, Head of Legal Services, was interviewed on this aspect with particular reference to the City Council's role in TPO issues. He explained that situations regarding threatened trees already covered by a TPO generally require little technical knowledge from the attending officer. In contrast threatened trees with no TPO require a reasonable degree of expertise to determine the amenity value of the tree. During out of hours, this task is undertaken by planners rather than arboriculturalists.
- 10.2 Insofar as responsibilities are concerned, it was confirmed that the Council has no statutory duty to protect and preserve trees, but in practice, almost every Council does.
- 10.3 The ISG considered the importance of speed to protect threatened trees and that procedures might be developed which will enable relevant officers to apply for an immediate court injunction (via mobile phone from on site at the threatened tree) or issue an "on-the-spot" TPO, which would need to clearly demonstrate the location of the threatened tree so provision of plans on site was important.

10.4 One option considered by ISG members was the possibility of delegating powers to a Parish Council in order for a possible local swifter response during OoH, with action reverting to WCC staff when offices re-opened. However, the legal view is that the validity of the TPO could be open to challenge if the Parish Council lacked the required level of expertise to make the order.

11. Implications of Personnel Issues

11.1 The ISG interviewed Alison Gavin, Head of Organisational Development to consider the employment and personnel issues relating to the provision of OoH services.

11.2 The main aspects considered were as follows:

- If a new system of formalising call-out or standby services OoH was established, payments would be based on the average of neighbouring local authorities, taking into account the level of disruption the proposed service would cause affected staff and be subject to negotiation with the union.
- Staff contracts can be altered after 3 month's notice, but this was an undesirable option as it was likely to affect staff turn-over.
- These new working arrangements would need to refer to the existing working time directives and offer time off in lieu (in addition to call-out or standby payments). There is also a requirement for an 11 hour break between shifts.
- Lone Working practices must be adhered to where applicable, which included calling into Central Control and avoiding situations where conflict was likely.
- She suggested that the level of OoH service provided should be two members of staff – one on standby to receive more complex referred calls from Central Control and another on callout, ready to visit sites if necessary.
- That, under the current arrangements, there is no contractual obligations for staff to work OoH on a grace and favour basis. However, staff that do this can be rewarded with honorariums.

11.3 It was noted that the ease of the negotiations with the Unions depended on whether staff are willing to have their contracts amended. The ISG noted the likely resistance to enforced OoH Service Provision given staff's personal circumstances and experiences of previous schemes.

11.4 In terms of options for implementation, the ISG were advised that, as each authority can choose how they compensated staff for providing OoH Services, there is a wide variety of schemes between neighbouring authorities. Call patterns to Central Control suggest that greatest demand for an OoH Service is at weekends and bank holidays and not during the weekday evenings.

11.5 It was more likely that younger members of staff will volunteer for OoH Services for economic reasons, although this presented problems in that they often lack the necessary experience to deal with all types of call. It may be

possible to overcome this with additional training where required to fill knowledge or skills gaps.

- 11.6 The ISG highlighted the public's frustration with providing a service which can deal with their call via the Call Centre with possible transfer to an expert officer, but with no guarantee of a site visit. There is also a danger of the same officer who receives the call deciding whether they need to attend the site (based on the financial gain to the officer concerned, through compensation payments), the potential abuse of the scheme should be identified through good management and that, in any case, all such a systems require an element of trust.
- 11.7 The ISG also identified that any changes to conditions of service and contracts of employment require negotiations with the Union, revised contracts to include OoH Service and the quickest this could be achieved would be 2-3 months.

12. Complaints about lack of Service

- 12.1 The ISG interviewed Andrew Hiney, Complaints Officer regarding the expectations of those who might scrutinise the City Council's performance in terms of provision of OoH services and, in particular, the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 12.2 It was explained that the Ombudsman can only find Councils guilty of mal-administration if a problem in the service it provided is proven. If the Council chose not to provide a service (and justify why), then it can be argued that there is no case for the Ombudsman to investigate.
- 12.3 The Group discussed how Councils are moving away from providing services which they are not bound by law to provide. For example, Winchester no longer conducts home inspections for the re-homing of animals. This was previously carried out as a voluntary service but following criticism of the scheme resulting from a complaint, the policy was reviewed and a decision made to cease the provision of that service. The proper audit trail of the decision process for this OoH policy review should prevent criticism by the Ombudsman in the future. AH also explained that he unaware of any complaints to the Council regarding its lack of OoH services.

13. Risk and Insurance Issues

- 13.1 The ISG interviewed David Read, Risk Management & Insurance Officer in order to consider any insurance or risk issues associated with a lack of OoH services.
- 13.2 It was concluded that any insurance claims in respect of this issue would examine whether the Council had acted in accordance with its policies. The ISG discussed the expectation levels of the public and the importance of communicating what the Services the Council can and cannot provide.
- 13.3 The ISG Group was concerned regarding the lack of guaranteed OoH Service regarding dangerous structures but this was balanced against the legal

position that the Council are unlikely to be legally liable if a structure collapsed (provided it was not in the Council's ownership) if the first time it was reported was OoH. However, the Group agreed that the public are likely to consider the Council morally responsible for not acting.

14 Benchmarking against other Local Authorities

14.1 During the review the ISG considered comparative data showing what level of service was provided by neighbouring local authorities and across Hampshire. The following services were examined in detail:

- Environmental Health
- Building Control
- Access and Infrastructure
- Tree Preservation Orders

14.2 No obvious conclusions could be drawn from the data as there were a number of variations in the level of service provided dependent upon the priority given to the issue by a particular authority. However, overall, it appeared that the City Council is behind others in the type of service it provides other than for Access & Infrastructure where a formal standby service exists.

15 Review Conclusions

15.1 In concluding the review the ISG decided to address a series of questions in relation to each service under review:

- a) Is there a need to change the current OoH arrangements, having considered the number and type of calls, the risks, and the level of public expectation?
- b) If there is a need to change, what would a new system look like? Should it be an informal or formal system, or a combination of both? Considerations of this aspect include costs, capacity issues and an investigation of other options (for example, delegating TPO powers to Parish Councils)?
- c) Even if change is not proposed, are there ways to improve the current arrangements – e.g. in the way services were advertised and promoted?

15.2 The Group considered the option of putting any proposals out to consultation using the Citizens Panel but discounted this as they considered it likely that, without an understanding of the wider capacity and financial pressures on the Council, it was very probable that the Panel would favour an improvement of services without considering cost implications and value for money which were critical factors.

15.3 That being said, the Group agreed that, while they should have regard to issues of affordability, their recommendations should principally be service driven, with affordability being a matter for the Portfolio Holders to consider.

From this and the information the Group drew from its previous witnesses, the Group agreed upon the following conclusions, on a service by service basis:

15.3 Building Control

15.3.1 The Group felt that the OoH provision of Building Control was too reliant on the voluntary help of the current Head of Service and that the majority of neighbouring authorities offer a more formalised service.

15.3.2 The Group discussed the possibility of contracting out the Building Control Service to an external company to cover OoH provision, but discount this due to the additional costs, such as retainers, above any additional staff costs to use the existing team.

15.3.3 The Group agreed therefore to highlight to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Access that the current arrangement was too reliant on the goodwill of one individual (the current Head of Building Control). It recommends that the Portfolio Holder reconsiders this arrangement and, at the very least, investigates measures to provide cover in the absence of the Head of Building Control.

15.3.4 The Group further recommends that the Portfolio Holder considers introducing a voluntary cascade system, similar to that operated by New Forest District Council, which compensates staff with time off in lieu. If need be, the Portfolio Holder may wish to consider strengthening this by making budgetary provision for overtime costs and standby allowances.

15.3.5 Furthermore, the Group requests that the Portfolio Holder investigates the implications of providing an improved OoH Service on staff contracts, with a possible view to amending the contracts of new staff as they join the Council.

15.4 Access and Infrastructure

15.4.1 The Group agree that the current arrangements provide a good service OoH and require no amendment.

15.5 Environmental Health

15.5.1 The Group conclude that the current arrangement whereby the Head of Environment is contacted OoH by the Call Centre (and if he was unavailable, his Team Leaders) is unlikely to meet public expectations of Service, notwithstanding the professional quality of the limited advice available.

15.5.2 The Group therefore recommends that the Portfolio Holder for Environment re-establishes the guaranteed telephone response by Environmental Health staff to callers (filtered through Central Control) using the existing standby allowance rates. The officer will make a judgement as to whether the call requires a visit and if an officer is able to visit, this should be compensated by time off in lieu. The effect of this change should be reviewed a year after its introduction and consideration given to the service being extended if it was felt to be effective.

15.5.3 The ISG note the cost implications of this proposal (in the region of £7000) and agree that the proposal would have to be properly costed. It is also dependent upon finding sufficient volunteers to run the service.

15.5.4 The Group noted that the advice given to callers by Environmental Health officers is complex and does not lend itself to a flow-chart driven, call centre type of response. However, a lot of the information they give the vast majority of callers could be made available on the website and this option should be investigated.

15.5.5 The ISG discounts the idea of a shared service with other local authorities OoH and they do not consider that this would offer the necessary local knowledge to offer informed advice.

15.6 Stray dogs

The Group note and commend that the OoH Service for Stray Dogs is to be reviewed with the aim of trying to provide a more local kennel facility if possible.

15.7 Trees

15.7.1 The Group note the crucial importance of speed in responding to help save threatened trees and therefore recommend that the Portfolio Holder investigates the option of delegating TPO powers to Parish Councils, at least OoH with WCC staff picking these up on resumption. The Group also suggest that the Portfolio Holder consider what alternative steps can be taken in the unparished area of Winchester town.

15.7.2 The Group note the Arboricultural Team's recent transfer to the Environment Division and, beside the Head's planned review of the Service, the Group agree that trees should be covered by the same OoH provision as the rest of the Environment Division. Therefore [and subject to 15.7.1 above], it suggests that they provide a guaranteed telephone response to callers (filtered through Central Control). The officer will make a judgement as to whether the call requires a visit and if the officer is able to visit, this should be compensated by time off in lieu.

15.8 Advertisements of OoH Services

15.8.1 The Group consider the Council's current Telephone Book advert is unclear and the relevant website page provides insufficient information. It recommends that these should be reviewed by the Head of Communications and the Head of Customer Services to clarify the level of service provided OoH.