

NORTH EAST DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



**North East
Derbyshire**
District Council

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

OUT OF HOURS SERVICE

MAY 2022

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Chair's Foreword

I am pleased to present this report on behalf of the Communities Scrutiny Committee. These are the findings, conclusions and recommendations from its review into the potential establishment of an out of hours service at North East Derbyshire District Council.

The Review investigated the current out of hours provisions provided by the Council, the benefits and potential issues of establishing an out of hours service, and whether there was suitable demand by residents for an established out of hours team.

During the review period, the Committee held a number of interviews at which it heard from a range of stakeholders. I would like to thank them for their contribution to the review, and also thank the Senior Scrutiny Officer for his support of the Committee's work, and Democratic Services for the help they provided.

Councillor Kevin Tait
Chair of Communities Scrutiny Committee

Review Panel

The review panel comprised the following members:

Councillor K Tait	-	(Conservative) – Review Panel Chair
Councillor J Birkin	-	(Labour)
Councillor T Lacey	-	(Labour)
Councillor B Lewis	-	(Conservative)
Councillor L Deighton	-	(Conservative)
Councillor R Hall	-	(Conservative)
Councillor P Windley	-	(Liberal Democrat)
Councillor J Lilley	-	(Labour)
Councillor P Wheelhouse	-	(Conservative)

1. Recommendations

That the Council:

- 1.1 Does not consider an out of hours service at this present time due to a lack of demand, an unclear remit, costs and sufficient existing arrangements.
- 1.2 Considers a dedicated out of hours area on the NEDDC website which outlines key contacts and where issues in which out of hours attention may need to be provided can be reported.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 At its meeting on 02 July 2021 the Communities Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review into the establishment of an out of hours service.
- 2.2 The review panel thought that a review be prudent to assess the demand from residents for the service and how a service could work.

3. Scope of Review

- 3.1 The review aimed to:
 - Understand any current provision of an out of hours service that the Council currently provides;
 - Investigate the benefits and potential issues of introducing an out of hours service;
 - Establish whether there is demand from our residents; and
 - Identify any improvements that could be made.

4. Method of Review

- 4.1 The review panel met on six occasions to consider the scope of the review, key issues they wanted to discuss and key people they wished to interview.
- 4.2 Evidence was gathered in a variety of ways including written sources and interviews with a range of stakeholders.
- 4.3 The Committee initially interviewed the Community Safety Enforcement Manager at Bolsover District Council who gave an overview of the service that the Community Enforcement Rangers (formerly known as CAN Rangers) provided, as well as the level of demand and main issues that they helped to resolve.

Subsequently, Members then interviewed officers from NEDDC who set out the remit of their service and how it dealt with out of hours calls. This was to understand the out of hours provisions that the Council provided, how it compared with the service offered by the CE Rangers, and assess if there was demand from residents for an out of hours service at the Council.

5. Evidence and Research

5.1 A number of documents and evidence were provided to the review panel for consideration. Details are provided below:

- Scene Setting Presentation by the Team Manager – Environmental Enforcement and Community Safety Enforcement Manager (Bolsover District Council).
- Service requests for the Community Enforcement Rangers at Bolsover District Council.
- Reactive service requests for Officers from the Environmental Health Team, Streetscene, Planning, Rykneld Homes and the Community Safety Teams.
- Interviews with officers and the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services.

6. Key Findings

6.1 Strengths/Observations

6.1.1 The Committee heard from the Team Manager – Environmental Enforcement who clarified the existing out of hours provisions provided by Environmental Health at NEDDC which included environmental crime, environmental protection, housing and public health, licensing, and commercial. It was generally reactive, dependant on staff availability and based on demand. The officer informed the Committee that the service had received over 5000 requests in 2021 but it was not clear how many of those would have benefited from an out of hours arrangement.

This was contrasted with the Community Enforcement Rangers at Bolsover District Council who provided a service to the public of Bolsover between the hours of 8am until midnight – 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The Rangers assisted with a wide ranging number of issues including anti-social behaviour, environmental crime, crime prevention, out of hours repairs and emergencies (housing), and PSPO enforcement.

6.1.2 Upon contrasting the two services, Members agreed that there were certain benefits to establishing an out of hours service. It was a deterrent so residents were less likely to commit offences; it was easier to gather evidence for a range of offences which could be used for enforcement action (such as visual/audio evidence); it resulted in better customer service; it reduced demand and workload on staff during their working day;

and it eased pressure on other departments. For example, the Environmental Health Manager and the Environmental Enforcement Team Manager both informed the Committee that officers were currently not able to gather immediate evidence for some out of hours complaints such as noise complaints, and instead relied on diaries which were completed by the complainant to trigger an investigation. Residents could potentially view this as a poorer service when compared to other local authorities who provided officers who could immediately investigate when the alleged offences occur, as well as prevent escalation and bring a swift resolution to conflict.

6.1.3 The Review Panel heard that the cost of a service similar to the one at Bolsover District Council could cost around £270,000 per annum, or a more targeted and focused service that operated at peak times could cost around £60,000 if it was within the remit of Environmental Health. It could focus on low level anti-social behaviour, environmental crime, planning enforcement, and community safety issues. Consideration should also be given to the fact that an out of hours service could make savings to other departments and therefore this mitigated the annual budget. It could also be started as a small trial service.

6.1.4 Members agreed that a service which had a community focus may be of benefit to residents ensuring that the District was safer and prevented low level anti-social behaviour. The Committee heard from the Head of Neighbourhoods and the Head of Corporate Services at Rykneld Homes who explained that although Rykneld Homes provided out of hours provisions for anti-social behaviour, incidents that occurred in areas not managed by Rykneld was referred to the Community Safety Partnership and/or police.

The Community Safety Manager advised that there were no out of hours provisions for incidents of anti-social behaviour for residents who were not Rykneld tenants, and emergencies or any criminality must be reported to the Police. If the behaviour was not of a significant emergency then residents could report this online and this would be investigated during normal working hours. Over the past 14 months, there had been 104 incidents which had been responded to, investigated, or referred to other organisations for assistance by the Community Safety Partnership. If the service had a remit for anti-social behaviour, it could be partly funded through the HRA which would help reduce the overall cost.

The CE Rangers at BDC also worked well with external partners, including the police, and that this had helped prevent anti-social behaviour. They had also delivered other community benefits during the pandemic when assisting other Council departments to deliver vital functions and essential services.

Areas for Improvement/Observations

- 6.2.1 The Review Panel heard from a number of officers, all of whom suggested that an out of hours service at NEDDC was not needed and that out of hours work was generally of low demand.

The Head of Streetscene informed Members that in the past three months there had been 0 requests for out of hours work. The service had arrangements in place for emergencies such as flooding and drug paraphernalia and staff had flexibility clauses in their contracts if they were required to attend a call out. It was stated that there was generally a low frequency of calls and that the service operated well within the current arrangements.

The Committee heard from the Environmental Health Service Manager who advised that out of hours work within Environmental Health was generally of low demand and coped well within the existing system. There was a low frequency of calls for issues that required an out of hours investigation such as noise nuisance, and it was very rare that immediate enforcement action was needed or could be taken. If there was an out of hours visit required, it could be accommodated with the use of the flexi scheme for staff. The majority of out of hours work for Environmental Health was scheduled work such as food and premises inspections. Members noted that Rotherham Borough Council had scaled back their out of hours service due to a lack of demand.

The Principal Planning Enforcement Officer advised the Review Panel that an out of hours service was not needed for planning enforcement. In the year 2020 there had been 229 enforcement enquiries, and in 2021 there had been 315. In both years there had only been 3 that required an out of hours inspection, and that this could easily be accommodated within the current system using the flexi-scheme for staff.

- 6.2.2 The Head of Neighbourhoods and the Head of Corporate Services at Rykneld Homes attended a meeting to discuss the out of hours provisions for Rykneld tenants. The Review Panel heard that out of hours support was available which covered emergency repairs and anti-social behaviour, as well as a community alarm service for vulnerable tenants. These services typically received a high number of calls, particularly in winter months.
- 6.2.3 The Committee noted that there were potentially high costs associated with establishing an out of hours service, with the service at Bolsover District Council costing around £270,000 per year. This was, however, due its large remit and 7 day availability.

A service at NEDDC which was more targeted could cost between £50,000 to £60,000 if it was established within Environmental Health through new posts or paid overtime for existing staff.

- 6.2.4 The Review Panel agreed that there would be difficulty establishing a clear remit for the service. Many services which could operate out of hours either had low demand or sufficient existing arrangements. There would also be difficulties in establishing how it would operate, and this would be dependent on how much the Council wished to invest.

It could operate as:

- A service that operated 7 days a week;
- A focused service that operated solely on busy periods such as bank holidays and weekends and/or in the most populated areas in the District.

- 6.2.5 Evidence provided by the Community Safety Enforcement Manager (BDC) outlined that the bulk of the CE Rangers' work involved either environmental issues (30%), housing related issues (29%) or anti-social behaviour (22%). Upon interviewing service managers at NEDDC, it was established that housing related issues and anti-social behaviour were covered through out of hours provisions provided by Rykneld Homes for Rykneld tenants, and that environmental issues were covered by Environmental Health and Streetscene in which there was low demand for out of hours calls and could be managed through existing arrangements.

The Review Panel agreed that if an out of hours service was established for NEDDC, its largest area of work would likely include anti-social behaviour for non Rykneld tenants, but questioned whether demand would be sufficient or whether it was the role of the District Council to provide this. Other areas of work would likely include environmental crime and planning enforcement, however as previously concluded, out of hours demand for this was low and that current arrangements were sufficient.

- 6.2.6 Members agreed that an area on the website that pulled all of the information together for reporting issues that may require out of hours attention could be of benefit to residents. This could outline all the key contacts and out of hours provisions provided by the Council or partners for common issues such as anti-social behaviour, environmental crime, planning enforcement and parking. This would simplify the process and centralise key information.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The Review Panel heard from a range of stakeholders during the review process. The review identified a number of benefits in establishing an out of hours service at NEDDC.
- 7.2 There was, however, a number of issues to consider which included remit, cost, and demand. There was a consensus that existing arrangements may be sufficient for residents in the District.

Appendix A

Stakeholders Engaged During the Review

T Rush	-	Team Manager – Environmental Enforcement
M Liddy	-	Community Safety Enforcement Manager (BDC)
M Finn	-	Environmental Health Manager
S Brunt	-	Head of Streetscene
H Summers	-	Head of Neighbourhoods (Rykneld Homes)
L Gebbie	-	Head of Corporate Services (Rykneld Homes)
J Hawley	-	Principal Planning Enforcement Officer
Cllr C Cupit	-	Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services
F Green	-	Community Safety Manager