

Draft - Wirral Anti-Graffiti Strategy 2008/9

1.0 STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF GRAFFITI

1.1 Liveability Steering Group

Wirral Council's Technical Services Department leads a multi agency Liveability Steering Group, examining ways to improve environmental conditions in neighbourhoods where there have been particular or on going related problems, including graffiti. The Liveability Group recognise the merit of preventive and partnership approaches in high density/high demand neighbourhoods as a means to improve conditions. The developing approach to the treatment of graffiti is part of the action planning process in dealing with neighbourhood based liveability issues. This Steering Group will monitor the effectiveness of the graffiti removal approaches carried out in Wirral, with respect to national indicator NI195 and the Local Area Agreement Priority Area target for improving environmental quality in deprived areas.

1.2 Merseyside Cleaner, Greener, Safer Partnership

Wirral Council is part of the Merseyside Cleaner, Greener, Safer Partnership facilitated by EnCams (formerly the Tidy Britain Group). This partnership will aim to secure regional agreements with statutory undertakers/utility companies in order to unify approaches and resources allocated by these companies for the effective management of graffiti problems.

A Memorandum of Understanding will be developed with services where partnerships cannot be secured to agree their responsibility for the removal of graffiti within defined service standard parameters. This work will extend to Merseytravel and the British Transport Police (BTP).

1.3 Income generation

The graffiti removal service shall be operated by a not-for-profit organisation in conjunction with the Council. Wherever practical, income will be generated through partnership working with other statutory undertakers to help supplement the funding of the graffiti removal service. Any net profits realised through the graffiti operations shall be re-invested into the service to enhance resources for additional removal, or support related educational initiatives, including local community empowerment.

2.0 GRAFFITI REMOVAL

2.1 The most effective deterrent to graffiti is its prompt removal or defacement pending removal. A new approach to removal will ensure a swift and more comprehensive removal response. Wirral Council will not tolerate graffiti incidents on any land or property (This does not

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include graffiti style art that has been authorised for community/private projects).

2.2 Graffiti Removal Policy

Graffiti removal resources available to Wirral Council will be utilised to carry out:

Rapid response (within 24 hours) to reports of racist and/or offensive graffiti on all accessible land and property.

Programmed graffiti removal in hot spot areas from all public and private residential land and property.

Response to requests for removal of graffiti from all public and private residential land and property and those SME's engaged with the Wirral Tidy Business Awards Scheme.

Further details are contained within the *Wirral Graffiti Removal Policy*. Service standards will be communicated to residents and business in Wirral through the Council's website and front of office services such as One Stop Shops; the Streetscene and the Anti-Social Behaviour "It's Your Call" service.

2.3 Graffiti removal methods

The physical elements of the graffiti service will be based around three methods:

- **Graffiti removal**
- **Use of paint coverings**
- **Use of 'anti graffiti' coatings**

Standard graffiti removal will involve the use of 'limestone cleaner' and cold and/or hot water jet wash machinery for the vast majority of marks. Simple 'graffiti wipes' and other materials may also be used on certain paints/markings.

In some cases graffiti can be removed more easily and at less cost by covering over the offending marks. This will be carried out by applying paint on a surface. For example black telecom boxes and alleygates are re-sprayed black. Red brick paint, white wash and specialised obliteration paint will also be used on surfaces when appropriate.

Anti-graffiti coatings will be used on surfaces that are repeatedly daubed. The assessment of where and when anti-graffiti coatings should be used will be based on data/information about reappearance of graffiti on particular surfaces/areas.

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A rolling programme of applying anti-graffiti coatings to street furniture and Council buildings suffering from repeat graffiti attacks will be developed.

2.4 Management of graffiti removal

2.4.1 Managing graffiti removal requests

Graffiti reports will arise primarily from wardens, Council Officers, Members and the public via the "It's Your Call" service and Streetscene. Removal requests will be recorded on CRM and Together NMP will have access to CRM via a VPN Key Fob and will be responsible for programming all reactive the work for the graffiti removal teams in order to meet agreed service standards. Together NMP (through their admin desk) will also update CRM and close down completed tasks on a daily basis.

If the instance of graffiti is categorised as a crime by the police, the Council may seek to recover removal costs through the courts. Any communications campaign will promote the use of the "It's Your Call" service (0151 606 2020 and available at any One Stop Shop).

NB (Interim Arrangement): It is anticipated that Together NMP will not have access to the CRM until November 2008. In the interim, graffiti reports will be screen-dumped and sent daily to Together NMP by the Council's Waste & Recycling Environmental Services Section (admin team). Together NMP will programme each list and return a daily completed job sheet in order that the CRM job can be closed. Any jobs that may require completing outside the 28-day SLA due to a high volume of requests will also be returned with an expected completion date, in order that the CRM may be updated.

2.4.2 Work priorities

The *Graffiti Removal Policy* details the service standards to which the Council has agreed to operate.

It is anticipated that at least the first six months of the programme will be a 'catch up phase' involving the complete removal of existing graffiti in hot-spot areas. These graffiti blitzes will primarily target deprived areas and key gateways, where graffiti is most prevalent.

Non urgent graffiti removal requests will be integrated into the 'catch up' work programme to minimise the disruption of programmed work and optimise the time spent on removal as opposed to travelling between sites.

2.4.3 Operational considerations

Day to day graffiti removal operations will be managed by Together NMP. Together NMP has been piloting approaches to a range of environmental treatments jointly with Technical Services and has achieved success both in actual environmental standards and in resident satisfaction. Together NMP takes a social enterprise approach to its business wherever possible via the coordination and maintenance of partnerships. This means that commercial arrangements are flexible and any surplus is used to address other environmental concerns or returned for other community benefits.

Partnership arrangements with the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) will be developed to include offenders on a risk managed basis in the delivery of the graffiti removal service and also potentially within Together NMP's broader environmental programme.

About Together NMP

Together Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder is one of 35 Government-sponsored national pilot programmes. Established in 2004, the Pathfinder operates as a partnership of statutory and non-statutory agencies and residents.

Turnover over the last twelve months has exceeded £510,000, and is expected to rise to over £700,000 during this financial year. Financial management and reporting is supervised by Together's Partnership Board, in accordance with Government and Local Authority financial rules.

Together's core Neighbourhood Management Team are employed by Riverside Housing and enjoy corporate support available from one of the largest Registered Social Landlords in the country.

Green Apprentices have been appointed as operations partner by Together's Board for delivery of a Lottery funded Green Together Programme, Neighbourhood Environment Team (NET) and Bag a Bargain (BaB) schemes. Green Apprentices staff will carry out graffiti removal operations on behalf of Together NMP. The Green Apprentices have a strong track record in the development and delivery of environmental programmes, employment training and skills projects across the North West in line with European, Learning and Skills Council, Neighbourhood Renewal and Housing Market Renewal contract criteria.

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2.5 Health and safety

All work related procedures and use of substances have been fully risk assessed under relevant regulations and staff have received comprehensive training with relevant personal protective equipment supplied. Site risk assessments will be carried out by a suitably trained person from the Together NMP team, prior to work commencing on site. This will include an assessment of risk to health and safety of the graffiti removal crew, accompanying offenders and passers by. Health and safety procedures will be reviewed on a regular basis. Together NMP will be responsible for the maintenance of graffiti removal equipment. The operational teams will have use of all Fire Stations in Wirral for re-filling the water bowser and use conveniences, in addition to the depot provided by Together NMP.

2.6 Reparation

As part of the response, graffiti removal will be undertaken by adult (and potentially juvenile) offenders/perpetrators undertaking reparation. This will be carried out visibly in the community to show the consequences of crime and anti-social behaviour and to act as a deterrent to future unacceptable behaviour.

Work will be undertaken with HM Courts' Service highlighting the successful use of reparation in Wirral and encouraging the issuing of Reparation Orders, in appropriate circumstances, to individuals who have committed criminal damage and other similar type offences.

Community payback in the offenders' own communities will be encouraged.

3.0 PROACTIVE GRAFFITI MANAGEMENT

3.1 Graffiti removal blitzes

Hot spots areas will be, where possible, subjected to programmed removal 'blitzes'. This will involve all relevant agencies pooling graffiti removal resources at one time into an area to help make that area graffiti free. The area will then be monitored closely to respond to repeat attacks in a timely manner and carry out investigations to identify graffiti vandals.

3.2 Improved recording and intelligence & evidence gathering

3.2.1 Partnership working

Covert and overt surveillance will be used to identify graffiti offenders. This includes the use of fixed and mobile CCTV and 'Talking' CCTV will be used at appropriate sites to deter or halt graffiti daubing. Patrols by officers including wardens, Wirral Community Patrol and PCSOs at

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known hot-spot locations will also be undertaken in the course of their duties.

Neighbourhood Management Organisations, the Wirral Federation of Tenants and Resident Associations and Neighbourhood Watch Schemes will be encouraged to participate and the 'RingMaster' system will be used to provide key messages and information to Neighbourhood Watch leaders.

Through work in schools and working with teachers, art and daubing on schoolbooks will be used more consistently to identify 'tags' and alleged offenders.

3.2.2 Graffiti Web Base

In order to improve systems for the recording of instances of graffiti and gathering of evidence related to both locations and offenders, and whilst awaiting service developments within the CRM, a Graffiti Web Base will be implemented.

The online recording database will be available for use by officers from a variety of agencies (such as police officers, PCSOs, wardens, Housing Officers, etc). Officers 'on the street' will use the system to record any instances of graffiti that are sighted, providing specific details relating to the graffiti including location, tags, medium used, etc. The system will have the facility to upload photographs of graffiti instances that may be used as evidence at a later date.

The system will then be used to identify repeat and hot-spot locations and gather evidence on possible offenders. This will lead to more targeted activity in areas and possible identification and prosecution of offenders. Over time a baseline for graffiti incidents can be developed as can more specific targets for its reduction. The impact of initiatives may also be assessed more effectively.

Each and every incident of graffiti uploaded on to the Graffiti Web Base will automatically result in the generation of an email to the Council's Call Centre. The Call Centre advisors will manually input the emailed data into the CRM that will then generate a service request for its removal; this is no more onerous than taking a telephone call directly from an agency reporting the graffiti.

Any graffiti reported directly to the Call Centre by a member of the public will be photographed prior to its removal by Together NMP. The details relating to the instance will be retrospectively uploaded on to the Graffiti Web Base to ensure that all graffiti identified across the borough is recorded.

It is envisaged that over time, when developments within the CRM progress (such as the ability to upload photographs to graffiti records)

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the Graffiti Web Base may become obsolete. However the necessary service developments are likely to be at least 24 months away.

3.2.3 Preventative work with young people

Analysis shows that the average graffiti offender age is 17 years old and the peak time for vandalism is between 4pm-7pm. Peak times often coincide with half terms and the school summer holidays.

3.3.1 Education and awareness

Work will continue at both primary and secondary school level raising awareness about the impact of graffiti (criminal damage) and the consequences for offenders. This work is most effective when local issues and areas affected are discussed with the children and young people.

RESPECT PROGRAMME

Wirral Anti-Social Behaviour Team operates a Respect Programme in both primary and secondary schools. This is focused upon anti-social behaviour and the consequences and includes specific focuses upon arson and fire; truancy and criminal damage.

The work in secondary schools is led by a seconded officer from Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service. Work in primary schools is led by seconded officers from the Council's Education Social Welfare Service & Merseyside Police and culminates in a mock courtroom trial involving the young people and is supported by officers from HM Courts' Service.

Ad hoc work is also undertaken when there is a sudden increase in graffiti in an area or it is identified as a hot-spot, which involves the Team's Criminal Damage Reduction Officer and partners attending assemblies and conducting an abbreviated presentation on graffiti using visual images from the local area.

Preventative work with children and young people will continue to be undertaken.

Schoolchildren will also be encouraged as part of the Citizenship curriculum to take responsibility for their immediate environment (including minor graffiti removal).

3.3.2 Diversion

Intelligence will be used to influence and direct diversionary activity with young people engaged in criminal damage and/or within hot spot areas.

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3.3.4 Community ownership

Projects involving communities (and particularly young people) taking ownership of local areas will be actively encouraged and supported wherever possible. Anti-graffiti or environmental improvement events will be encouraged and publicised. Where practical, this will be planned to coincide with graffiti “blitzes” covering a wider area.

3.4 Communication campaigns

Regular campaigns will be aimed at the public emphasising the cost of graffiti to society and encouraging offenders and offences to be reported.

Campaigns will also be targeted at offenders and potential offenders outlining the consequences.

3.4.1 Reward schemes

This will include reward schemes aimed at young people, offering rewards for information leading to the prosecution of offenders. Initially this may be piloted in area/s where graffiti taggers are prevalent to be able to assess the impact of the initiative. Sponsorship from the private sector will be sought to fund or subsidise reward schemes.

3.4.2 Information campaigns

In areas targeted by persistent taggers, leaflets will be distributed to residents requesting information about the identity of the offender/s. This may include an element of reward. The use of police and Council web sites may be used in borough-wide campaigns.

3.4.3 Raising the profile of the “broken windows” effect

Staff from agencies, including schools, fire service, police, youth workers and Council building managers will be briefed on the impact that graffiti has on communities and how it can act as a precursor to other forms of anti-social and criminal behaviour. The importance of reporting graffiti and feeding in intelligence will be emphasised.

3.5 Work with businesses

The impact of graffiti on communities and the local economy will be emphasised to local businesses through one-to-one contact, forums and campaigns. Businesses will be encouraged to take ownership of their premises and surrounding areas. Initiatives will be developed, for example, sending postcards to businesses with photographs of their graffiti-affected premises.

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The Council's Technical Services Department is launching a 'Tidy Business Award Scheme' during the summer of 2008. Small and medium businesses or enterprises that sign up to this free scheme will commit to a number of actions and standards that aim to reduce any negative impact of their business on environmental quality. In return, the Council will assist the business with graffiti removal and where necessary help them take preventative measures. For example, businesses have the option to receive a graffiti removal kit and training to operate the kit safely and effectively. This service will be provided free of charge.

3.6 Control of graffiti mediums

If improved evidence gathering identifies a prevalence of the use of spray paints, in liaison with Trading Standards, the use of a voluntary scheme restricting the sale of spray paints to under 18's will be considered. In any event, outlets selling spray paints will be targeted with information about the use of spray paints to undertake graffiti.

Council Officers and national organisations, such as the Social Landlords' Crime and Nuisance Group, will co-ordinate activity to assist the Council to lobby central government for the restriction of the sale of other popular graffiti mediums (such as graffiti pens marketed primarily for the intention of graffiti to be carried out) and to make it illegal for adults to provide these mediums to anyone under the age of 18.

3.7 Situational crime prevention

Work will be undertaken with Safer Wirral's Crime Prevention Officers to 'design out crime', specifically around graffiti.

New developments deemed to be at risk from graffiti attacks, will be encouraged to reduce the likelihood of buildings and structures becoming targeted by graffiti vandals, by carrying out a graffiti impact assessment at the design stage, as part of a developer's overall responsibility to community safety. Technical Services will monitor the press list for planning applications and ensure applicants take reasonable action (for example, an application for conversion of residential premises to business premises may be required to apply anti-graffiti coating to their shop shutters, if graffiti is prevalent in the immediate area).

4.0 ENFORCEMENT ACTION

4.1 Offenders

Robust enforcement will be taken against graffiti offenders, including, but not exclusively, Formal Warnings, Formal Cautions, Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs), Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs), Anti-Social

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Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and Prosecution. Successful outcomes will be publicised.

4.2 Responsibility of land / property owner

The use of 'Defacement Removal Notices' (under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 as amended by the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005) will be used in appropriate circumstances against the 'person responsible' for the surface, which has been defaced by graffiti. Where necessary, the Council will remove, clear or otherwise the defacement and recover reasonable costs. This power will be used primarily on businesses and other statutory undertakers.

5.0 LEGALISED GRAFFITI SITES

5.1 Graffiti artists

The use of legalised sites that allow graffiti artists to carry out their 'hobby' has been criticised by statutory undertakers such as Network Rail, as such sites act as a 'practice zone' for potential graffiti vandals to hone their talent and speed up their ability to daub their tag or mark illegally. EnCams (formally 'Keep Britain Tidy') also hold a zero tolerance view.

Best practice from local authorities involved in managing legalised sites has shown that such sites should only be initiated if it improves environmental quality and community safety in the area, and that appropriate ongoing monitoring and resources are allocated to the management of the site in the longer term. Sites work best if graffiti artists are responsible, in part, for the management of the site, and that permission to use the site is restricted to authorised persons to minimise site's misuse (controlled by responsible local street artists).

The impact on the wider area, including neighbouring districts and major transport routes to and from the site should also be considered, as tags and artwork is more likely to occur as a result of a successful site, as it will certainly attract graffiti artists or followers from outside the borough. Police Officers and PCSOs would need to be involved in monitoring the site, in order to take appropriate action against site misuse from unauthorised persons.

Wirral Council and relevant partners will only consider authorising use of a legalised site after an Impact Assessment Survey and Risk Assessment have been carried out and all relevant stakeholders, including local residents have been consulted, showing overall support for the scheme.

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5.2 Community art projects

It is expected that any community projects with young people, using graffiti-style art, involve the provision of a clear brief to the young people. It is imperative that, if in a public area, this is recognised as public art and therefore has to be appropriate for the wider community. Any street art that is commissioned or organised by a community, must have draft designs approved by the community and relevant Council officers.

6.0 WIDER ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The links of this work to other environmental issues such as flytipping, flyposting and littering will be developed in line with the Technical Services Departmental Plan, the Transformational Change Agenda and the work of the Liveability Steering Group involving wider LAA partners.