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Neighbourhood wardens: the activity pattern in one English city

Conference paper

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The activities of Neighbourhood Wardens in Southampton

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Abstract

Since 2000, roughly 500 neighbourhood warden schemes have been set up in England and Wales. Wardens provide a uniformed, semi-official presence in a defined area—the smallest schemes cover a few buildings, while the largest encompass entire cities. Their duties vary, but can include patrolling, cleaning and maintaining public areas, organising youth programmes, and liaising with police. Wardens are increasingly popular internationally, where they may be known by names such as concierges, *regies de quartier*, and supercaretakers.

The introduction of wardens responds implicitly to the idea that problem neighbourhoods or estates suffer from bad or inefficient management. Wardens are seen as a way to address a range of local problems, from youth crime to abandoned vehicles to neglected gardens. There is a growing body of literature about the rationale for and organisation of warden schemes. Rather less is known about how wardens actually spend their time and what they cost.

This paper draws on a case study of the warden programme in the English city of Southampton and on existing evaluation literature. It describes findings about wardens' actual activity patterns, and asks to what extent they match their formal job descriptions and objectives. The paper presents some limited findings on the costs of wardens, draws some conclusions about which sorts of problem they might best address, and concludes with a short discussion of policy implications.

1. Introduction

Since 2000, roughly 500 neighbourhood warden schemes have been set up in England and Wales. Wardens are a uniformed, semi-official presence in a defined area—the smallest schemes cover a few buildings, while the largest encompass entire cities. They provide a number of common-sense, good-neighbour services such as cleaning graffiti, helping vulnerable elderly people, and organising youth programmes. In

addition, their very presence is felt to help deter low-level crime and disorder. Wardens are increasingly popular internationally, where they may be known by other names including concierges, *régies de quartier*, and supercaretakers.

The UK central government, which provided much of the initial funding for warden programmes, deliberately adopted a very broad definition of wardens and their duties. This flexibility allows each warden programme to focus on particular local problems; however, it also means that the concept is rather vague. What exactly do wardens do? There is a growing body of literature about the rationale for and organization of warden schemes, but rather less is known about how wardens actually spend their time and what they cost. This paper provides an analysis of actual warden activity in one English city.

The paper draws on existing evaluation literature and on a study of the warden programme in Southampton. After a discussion of the thinking behind the introduction of wardens in the UK, and a description of the current system, the paper turns to findings. It focuses on wardens' actual activity patterns, asking how the wardens allocate their time to various activities, and to what extent these activities match their formal job descriptions and objectives. The paper presents some limited findings on the costs of wardens, draws some conclusions about which sorts of problem they might best address, and concludes with a short discussion of policy implications.

2. Research question

This paper addresses the question: What is the actual activity pattern of neighbourhood wardens in Southampton, and how does it compare to their formal job descriptions?

3. Background: Neighbourhood Wardens in the UK

3.1 Development of the policy

In 1999 the UK central government, concerned with the entrenched problems of deprived neighbourhoods, brought together 18 panels of experts to assess various policy ideas for improving such neighbourhoods. One of these panels, Policy Action Team 6 (PAT 6), looked specifically at neighbourhood wardens. Their highly favourable report, based on studies of a few schemes already in operation in the UK and elsewhere, led the government to offer start-up funding for a number of new warden schemes on council estates across England and Wales.

The government's analysis of entrenched deprivation suggested that it stemmed from a number of causes. Neighbourhood wardens offered a promising tool because they could be deployed in many ways, and could simultaneously address various types of problems: environmental issues, social problems, and crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB).

The environmental problems on deprived estates (abandoned cars, graffiti, etc.) often reflected the strain on local housing management. Over the past 25 years, local councils in the UK had increasingly centralised their housing management, in a search for efficiency and lower cost. Housing services such as repairs and rent collection

were dealt with by a central department—or, frequently, by private firms contracted by the council—instead of by housing officers based on and responsible for each council estate. (Social Exclusion Unit 1999b) The partial withdrawal of the local council presence on estates meant, however, that many low-level problems were never dealt with or even recognised. Even as this process was happening, the dangers were recognised. “The role of on-the-spot management as part of the solution to the problems of deprived areas was highlighted by a DOE research team in a 1981 report on difficult to let housing. Remote centralised housing management was seen as a key problem.” (Social Exclusion Unit 1999a p. 7).

The social and crime problems of these estates were various. Some housed concentrations of vulnerable people; often the elderly, or minorities with a limited command of English. The estates were often plagued by ‘youth nuisance’, a catch-all term for everything from teenagers congregating in front of shops to arson. The withdrawal of local housing management, as well as local foot patrols by the police, had allowed these problems to fester. Neighbourhood wardens would address these problems directly—for example, by organising football clubs for young people or making small repairs for the elderly—as well as indirectly. The re-introduction of uniformed local officials, with responsibility for the neighbourhood, was expected to help deter low-level crime and ASB.

3.2 Organisation of neighbourhood warden programmes today

What are neighbourhood wardens supposed to do? The literature generally identifies four categories of function:

- Crime prevention
- Environmental improvements
- Community development
- Housing management

These functions are not mutually exclusive. The board of each neighbourhood warden scheme sets out its goals, which may include items that fall into any or all of these categories.

The ODPM found, in a 2004 study of 84 government-funded schemes, that reducing crime was the most common objective (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit 2004). Table 1 sets out the top ten objectives.

Table 1: Top objectives of 85 Neighbourhood Warden schemes

<i>Scheme objective</i>	<i>% of schemes citing</i>
Crime reduction	83
Reduce ASB	81
Reduce fear of crime	81
Improve environment	60
Develop community spirit	58
Improve quality of life	43
Develop links between community and partners	36
Minor crime deterrent	26

Promote social cohesion	24
Improve community safety	20

Neighbourhood Renewal Unit 2004

The fact that 5 of the top 10 objectives relate to crime suggests that crime reduction is seen to be a very important goal. The limited cost-benefit work that has been done on wardens concentrates on the benefits of reduced crime in warden areas (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit 2004, p.10). It does not address the benefits of environmental or management improvements—which can be harder to quantify.

There are four basic ways in which the wardens can be employed to carry out these functions. (SEU 199b) *Patrollers* routinely walk or drive through their ‘patch’ (area of responsibility), looking for environmental problems or illicit activity. *Concierges* are based in one location, usually a tower block. They monitor public areas and perform some maintenance. *Caretakers or supercaretakers* maintain and repair the buildings and public areas of housing estates. *Neighbourhood support workers* visit residents in need of assistance and organise activities. These approaches are not mutually exclusive.

There are now about 500 neighbourhood warden schemes operating in England and Wales, up from fewer than 100 in 1999. The schemes range in size—some cover a single housing estate, while others operate across an entire city. The number of wardens employed by the schemes ranges from one to more than 100. From 2000 to 2002, central government funded a total of 245 schemes¹, but this funding is being phased out and local authorities must now pay for wardens out of their own budgets. In general they have opted to continue the schemes, as they have proved to be very popular politically.

In the first year, central government start-up funding was offered only for schemes covering housing estates. Eligibility was subsequently expanded to cover town centres and areas of private housing. Many schemes now include city centres, other residential areas, or even entire towns. This obviously has implications for wardens’ duties; in an area with little council housing, for example, wardens will have few housing-management responsibilities. Besides specific central-government grants for neighbourhood warden programmes, other sources of funds have included local authorities themselves (some paid for the expansion of popular existing schemes, or covered the cost of schemes that did not win central government funding) and other central government programmes (such as neighbourhood renewal grants).

4 Methodology

In late 2004/early 2005, LSE researchers carried out an evaluation of the neighbourhood wardens programme in three Southampton neighbourhoods, on behalf of Southampton City Council. Researchers were asked to gauge how well the scheme fulfilled its stated aims and assess value for money.

¹ Funding was offered in 2000 for ‘neighbourhood wardens’; in 2001 for ‘street wardens’, and in 2002 for ‘street crime wardens’. These each had a slightly different focus but all come under the general category of neighbourhood wardens as we have employed it. For details about various warden schemes in the UK, <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=562> provides many useful links.

The researchers conducted interviews, focus groups and site visits in Southampton over the period of January – April 2005. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face, with only seven interviews taking place by telephone. In total 76 interviews/focus groups were conducted involving 93 individuals. Every neighbourhood warden in the three study areas was interviewed, as were other council officers involved in the warden programme. Researchers also spoke to local residents, school officials, and police and fire officers to ask about their views of the operation and impact of the neighbourhood warden scheme.

Members of the research team visited each of the three evaluation areas. Wardens conducted the researchers around their areas (on foot and/or in the wardens' vans) to show them particular problem areas or projects they had worked on, and to describe their day-to-day work.

Data were collected on the activities and performance outputs of the neighbourhood wardens and related council services; outcomes in areas where the wardens might be expected to have an impact (e.g. recorded crime, abandoned vehicles; tenants' perceptions); and costs of the neighbourhood warden scheme and of related services.

5 Southampton and its Neighbourhood Warden programme

5.1 Policy development in Southampton

Southampton is a city of 221,000 people located in the prosperous south of England. It covers an area of 50 km². Some 19% of Southampton's population lives in council housing, which is about the national average.

In 2000, the council conducted a thorough review of caretaking services for its stock of council housing. The results of the consultation suggested that the city needed to:

- improve the general appearance of council estates;
- improve the collection of rubbish, litter and bulk refuse from the estates;
- improve horticultural and grass cutting services;
- provide a coherent caretaking service, by the provision of one point of contact for all caretaking issues; and
- improve security on estates and for those living on estates.

In January 2002, in response to this review, the city introduced the Southampton Neighbourhood Warden Scheme. Initially there were ten wardens working in two neighbourhoods. The scheme had increased to 35 wardens by 2005, and covered all areas of the city. Southampton's scheme has three overall objectives:

- To improve the environment
- To control crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB)
- To enhance community confidence and reassurance

The scheme costs about £1.3 million per year; part of this money comes from central government and part from the city's own budget.

Of the four possible models for neighbourhood wardens schemes (see above), the Southampton scheme has at its core the supercaretaker model, although many council officers feel the wardens should also prioritise community safety.

At around the same time that Southampton created its neighbourhood warden programme, it also introduced City Patrol. This was another uniformed patrol service, but one which specifically targeted anti-social behaviour and youth nuisance. The 14 City Patrol officers patrol the entire city in vans, responding to complaints about low-level ASB. Two of the vans are fitted with roof-mounted CCTV, which can be used to gather evidence against trouble-makers, and some City Patrol officers can take statements for the police.

5.2 Management

The neighbourhood wardens were part of the Southampton Housing Department, and their line manager was the housing manager for the neighbourhood where they worked. This was the case even in areas without much local-authority housing. The senior neighbourhood warden in each team organised rotas and holidays, and co-ordinated the work of other wardens, but was not their manager. The city had two neighbourhood warden co-ordinators, chosen from among the local housing managers. They tried to ensure consistency of approach in the management of wardens across the city.

The wardens in one of the three case-study areas, Thornhill, were partially funded by a central government urban renewal scheme called New Deal for Communities. In this area an 'Inter-Agency Management Group', made up of representatives of the urban-renewal board and various local government departments, was responsible for shaping and steering the work of the wardens.

The foregoing describes the management structure for the wardens as of spring 2005; it has since been changed.

5.3 Case-study neighbourhoods

LSE researchers were asked to examine the wardens' operations in three relatively deprived areas of Southampton (which together account for about 24% of the city's population). These were:

- *Central* (7 wardens). A mixed-use, inner-city area with a high proportion of black and minority ethnic (BME) residents and young adults, especially students.
- *Thornhill* (4 wardens). Essentially a single council housing estate on the outskirts of the city.
- *Outer Shirley* (6 wardens). Similar to Thornhill, but consisting of a number of small estates rather than one large one.

A profile of Southampton and the three neighbourhood warden evaluation areas appears in Table 1.

Table 2: Profile of Southampton and the three neighbourhood warden evaluation areas (based on 2001 Census data)

	South- ampton	Central	Thornhill	Outer Shirley
Population	217,445	19,480	8,305	24,199
% Southampton population (census 29/4/01)		9	4	11
Number of households		7,619	3,616	10,174
% aged 0-15	18	14	25	24
% aged 65 and over	15	9	16	15
% black and minority ethnic	8	25	3	4
% households renting	62	67	61	52
% households council tenants	19	23	53	42
% lone parents with dependent children	7	7	13	12
% aged 16-74 unemployed	3	4	5	4
% aged 16-74 economically inactive	36	46	39	36
% aged 16-74 with no qualifications	26	21	42	41

The three evaluated areas are deprived relative to the whole of Southampton. In all three, the council considers poverty, housing, health, community safety and education to be major issues.

Thornhill and Outer Shirley are residential areas with high unemployment, where about half of households are council tenants. In both areas, there are high proportions of young people under 16 and lone parents with dependent children; about 40% of people aged 16-74 have no qualifications.

Central is somewhat different. It has low proportions of children and the elderly, and a high proportion of the economically inactive—although about half of these are students. Fewer than a quarter of households are council tenants, but there are many houses in multiple occupation.

5.4 Job descriptions of wardens

The wardens' official job description, taken from the Neighbourhood Wardens Manual, listed eight "purposes" and 16 "duties". They fell into four general categories—general and administrative duties; environmental work; work directed at reducing crime and anti-social behaviour; and work intended to improve a sense of community. Table 2 sets out the duties in the order in which they appeared in the official job description, although this did not necessarily reflect their order of priority. Most of the wardens' duties were of an environmental nature, as is perhaps to be expected given that the scheme followed the supercaretaker model.

Table 3: Duties of neighbourhood wardens

	Activity category			
	Gen/ Admin	Env	Crime/ ASB	Com- munity
1. To patrol the area on a daily basis, liaising with council services...ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the neighbourhood and people who live in the area	X	X	X	X
2. To provide a good neighbour service and support to local residents in the neighbourhood, being particularly aware of the needs of elderly/vulnerable tenants and victims of crime				X
3. To foster and develop customer involvement, customer liaison, community development and participation, working in close liaison with other agencies				X
4. To identify and report incidents of crime and nuisance which may occur on the estates			X	
5. Reporting abandoned vehicles to the Local Housing Office, and ensuring effective removal		X		
6. To ensure the safety and security of empty properties in the neighbourhood		X	X	
7. To report and/or order rectification of all defects and items in disrepair on the neighbourhood and to work with Local Housing Office staff to achieve and maintain a good appearance of the block(s)/neighbourhood. To chase repairs not completed on time.		X		
8. To co-ordinate and monitor other Council Services in the upkeep and cleanliness of the neighbourhood	X			
9. To carry out regular cleaning of entrances, refuse areas, shed areas of walk-up blocks, in accordance with the frequency guide chart.		X		
10. To report any unusual occurrence or problem to the appropriate local housing officers, and report daily to the local housing office. To keep a daily record of work completed and events occurring in the neighbourhood	X			
11. Undertake minor repair duties in communal areas, as specified and within your level of competence.		X		
12. To help co-ordinate the collection of bulky household refuse within/around block/neighbourhood		X		
13. To ensure the grounds and hard areas remain tidy by removal of casual litter, removal of small areas of graffiti etc, and reporting necessary work to other council divisions.		X		
14. To work in partnership with the Handyperson to carry out minor repairs and maintenance work and verify works completed.		X		
15. To carry out Health and Safety inspections within the neighbourhood and its immediate environment and take necessary action to record, report and remedy items urgently.		X		
16. To undertake duties external to the site(s), as required, including those associated with providing temporary cover at other Neighbourhood Warden sites.	X	X	X	X

The wardens' duties and responsibilities were set out in further detail in a voluminous Neighbourhood Wardens Manual, whose six chapters and 26 appendices covered everything from dealing with aggressive tenants to the contents of the tool kit. The manual also detailed the limits on wardens' activities. These limits, agreed with the unions representing other city employees, were designed to ensure that wardens did not infringe on their jobs. For example, wardens could re-attach no more than 10 boards of a close-boarded fence; re-fix no more than three paving slabs; and retouch the paint on doors, but not repaint them entirely.

While the wardens' manual was detailed and prescriptive, the strategic direction given to the wardens by the council was the opposite. The wardens were brought in to address those problems that had hitherto fallen between the cracks. They would deal with things that were not in the job descriptions of other council employees, or that were in their job descriptions but were so low-priority that they never got done. Councillors and senior officers said they wanted the wardens to challenge the working culture of the council, to find reasons to do things rather than reasons not to. The wardens clearly had absorbed this ethos, and several of them approvingly quoted the exhortation from a senior council officer to 'sail close to the wind' or 'challenge the status quo'.

5.5 Who the wardens were

Warden schemes in some countries, notably the Netherlands, have been used as a way to bring the long-term unemployed back into the labour market, but in the UK wardens generally do not come from the ranks of the jobless. The wardens deployed in the three evaluation areas ranged in age from mid-20s to mid-50s, and came from a variety of backgrounds; there was a former truck mechanic, a corporate personnel officer and a plumber. The majority were white males, and some worked in the areas where they lived. Almost without exception they expressed great enthusiasm for their jobs, some saying that they would happily do it even if they weren't paid.

5.6 Working arrangements and equipment

Each individual neighbourhood warden was responsible for a 'patch', or geographical area. The neighbourhood wardens and local council housing officers worked closely together, often speaking several times a day. There was full neighbourhood warden coverage in the three study areas — every street belonged to a patch. (All of Southampton had neighbourhood warden cover, in theory.) The wardens were not restricted to working on their own patches — a warden who was a skilled handyman might help another warden carry out repairs, or several wardens might work together on a project.

The neighbourhood wardens had office space (sometimes shared) in the local housing offices. Wardens spent most of their time out of the office on their patches, checking the condition of housing blocks, cleaning, carrying out repairs, etc. Each warden had his or her own van, which they keep at their homes overnight. The wardens generally moved around in their vans rather than on foot. They also used the vans to transport tools and equipment and to take bulk refuse to the tip. There were several types of van, of varying sizes, but each was equipped with the same basic set of equipment. This included cleaning supplies, a tool kit, and a graffiti-removal kit.

Wardens worked a flexible 37-hour week; time sheets we examined suggest that 7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. was a common pattern. On a day-to-day basis wardens generally set their own priorities and decided their own schedules. They usually called into the housing office first thing in the morning, and at other times of day. They were given some direction by the housing manager and the senior neighbourhood warden, but were expected largely to decide for themselves what needed doing, and to do it.

6 Findings: What did wardens actually do?

Interviews with wardens, a review of their activity records, and site visits provided a picture of the activities wardens engaged in on a day-to-day basis. These were as follows:

6.1 Checking council housing, cleaning, and removing graffiti (Duties 1, 7, 8, 9, 15)

The neighbourhood wardens carried out regular checks of communal areas of council housing, to assess any potential health and safety problems and the need for cleaning, litter or rubbish removal, repairs and so on. They either dealt with problems themselves, or referred them to other council departments.

Most wardens did some cleaning of communal areas – such as the stairs in walk-up blocks of flats. Some wardens cleaned only on an emergency basis and felt that cleaning should not be a regular part of their work. Others, however, cleaned regularly – sometimes alongside the estate cleaners. The wardens also encouraged council tenants to do their own cleaning, and occasionally provided equipment or organised cleaning rotas for tenants.

While neighbourhood wardens (and indeed residents and council officers) had differing views as to how much cleaning wardens should do, they generally agreed that graffiti removal was an important aspect of their work. Wardens painted over graffiti themselves if small areas were affected; larger-scale graffiti was reported to the council for removal.

6.2 Doing small repairs (Duties 11, 14)

Wardens sometimes carried out minor repairs in communal areas of council housing: for example, replacing damaged locks or fixing broken gates and fencing. As with cleaning, the time spent on repairs differed from warden to warden – some enjoyed the work and felt confident doing it, while others merely reported the problems to other council departments.

6.3 Removing litter, bulk refuse and abandoned vehicles (Duties 12, 13, 15)

As with cleaning work, some wardens did litter-picking routinely while others did it on an ad hoc basis only. Similarly, wardens removed items of bulk refuse (refrigerators, washing machines, etc.) in their own vans or asked the local housing waste removal team to remove larger items. The council and the fire service said the removal of rubbish was important not only because it radically improved the

appearance of neighbourhoods, but also because it reduced opportunities for arson. The same applied to the removal of abandoned vehicles. Wardens had the authority to request the immediate removal of abandoned vehicles that were obstructive or in a dangerous condition if they were on council land or public highways.

6.4 Gardening (not specifically mentioned in duties)

Horticultural work was not specifically mentioned in the warden's duties. Even so, wardens did small gardening jobs – particularly trimming hedges, cutting back overhanging branches and large shrubs, clearing and re-planting shrub beds, etc. – by themselves and often on their own initiative (or in response to complaints by residents). They referred larger jobs to the council's gardeners, and often worked with them. Sometimes the police asked wardens to do particular gardening jobs--for example, if they were concerned that overgrown shrubbery was providing a place for drug use and sex work.

Box 1: Gardening project in the Central area

Researchers accompanying wardens in the Central area were taken to a primary school where the wardens had worked on a project to clear and fence off a small green area adjacent to the playground, which had previously been frequented by drug users and sex workers. The headmaster, who praised the wardens and their commitment to helping the school and the wider neighbourhood, said the green area was now a pleasant play space for pupils. It was also used for a mother and toddler group attached to the school.

In addition to working on the green area inside the school boundaries, the wardens helped to tidy the adjoining bushes and public pathway, and were arranging for improved lighting to be installed. According to the wardens, local people had been frightened to use the path because of the drug use and sex work that took place there, but after the warden's intervention it was much more accessible.

6.5 Supporting environmental-crime enforcement and prevention (Duty 4)

One of the political priorities of Southampton City Council was 'enviro-crime'-- that is, criminal and anti-social behaviour that degrades the physical environment. The wardens worked with City Patrol to take enforcement action against people found littering or dumping rubbish. City Patrol officers sometime asked wardens to identify the people responsible for such problems. Wardens could themselves initiate fines for council tenants who left rubbish bags on their landings, although the fines were actually issued by the local housing office.

Wardens frequently consulted residents and advised on situational measures against enviro-crime – such as the use of unbreakable glass and anti-vandal paint, the installation of CCTV and improved lighting, and the erection of fencing around targeted areas. The wardens sometimes installed these measures themselves.

6.6 Participating in multi-agency improvement projects (Duty 3)

Wardens often worked with other agencies on one-off joint projects. On ‘clean and clear days’, several agencies would work together on litter-picking, rubbish removal and general cleansing in a designated area. During Crime Reduction and Environment Weeks (CREWs), a neighbourhood suffering from crime, ASB, or environmental was the subject of an intensive week-long intervention from the council (including the wardens). The first few days of each week were usually devoted to enforcement work (including, for example, truancy sweeps and vehicle checks). Later on in each CREW, wardens and other council employees did cleaning and rubbish removal as well as improvement work such as gardening. The wardens often attempted to involve local residents, particularly young people, in these activities.

6.7 Patrolling (Duty 1)

The wardens’ daily presence in their patches allowed them to keep an eye on what was happening in a more consistent and focused way than could the police, who had to respond to emergencies. The wardens wore distinctive uniforms, and several residents commented to researchers that they felt safer seeing a uniformed presence in their neighbourhoods.

6.8 Responding to minor ASB and neighbour disputes (Duty 4)

Wardens often mediated between local young people and adults. For example, they might ask teenagers to stop kicking a football against shop shutters. Wardens were also sometimes called to deal with neighbour disputes.

6.9 Installing security lights, gates, and locks (similar to Duty 6)

Installing lights in a previously dark area can reduce the incidence of drug use and other illicit activities, and make residents feel more secure after dark. Similarly, installing gates can reduce the level of opportunistic crime. Researchers were shown a small row of garages that had repeatedly been vandalised; the wardens installed gates across the only access road and the vandalism stopped. Wardens had improved security (installing locks, bolts, etc.) for repeat victims of burglary when asked to do so by police.

6.10 Providing information to police (Duty 4)

Wardens were required to report any illegal activity they witness—their job description said they must ‘identify and report incidents of crime and nuisance which may occur on the estates’. Most wardens did report incidents directly to the police, although some preferred to pass information through their housing manager. Some wardens were clearly more comfortable with the relationship with the police than others. The police often consulted the wardens about local crimes—for example, asking wardens to identify local youth offenders from CCTV tapes. Residents often reported crimes or other incidents to wardens. Some specifically asked the wardens to pass the information to the police, while others talked to wardens because they didn’t regard this as ‘grassing’.

6.11 Removing drugs litter and providing reports (part of Duty 13)

The wardens were trained in removal of drugs litter, and were required to report on the type, amount, and location of drug-related items they encountered. Wardens in the Central area in particular regularly removed large numbers of heroin-, cannabis- and cocaine-related items, and cleared known drug-use areas of paraphernalia. Table 4 shows the amount and type of drug litter removed in that area over a 12-month period.

Table 4 Drug litter recovered by neighbourhood wardens in Central Area, 03/2004 – 03/2005

Type	Number of incidents	Largest number of items found in one incident
Needles	84	120
Bongs	39	25
Syringes	30	23
Foil	26	30
Other paraphernalia	62	45

Source: Stockdale et al 2005, Table 7.1

6.12 Working with youth (not specifically mentioned in duties)

Many of the wardens worked well with young people, and they often tried to engage those most likely to be in trouble with the law. The wardens gave talks at local schools, worked with young people on graffiti art projects and on installing youth shelters, and organised informal football or basketball games for local teenagers. They worked jointly with the fire service on a diversion project where young people rebuilt motorcycles; the participants on the course had been referred by police liaison and the youth service. The Junior Neighbourhood Wardens programme, discussed elsewhere, was aimed in part at keeping pre-teens off the path of delinquency and crime.

6.13 Supporting ASBOs and ABCs (related to Duty 3)

Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) are statutory measures designed to protect the public from behaviour that may cause ‘harassment, alarm or distress’. An ASBO prohibits the offender from engaging in specific anti-social acts or entering defined areas, and is effective for a minimum of two years. Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) are voluntary agreements between individuals and one or more local agencies (e.g. police and housing), in which the individual agrees to stop engaging in certain anti-social acts. They are most commonly used for young people, but may also be used for adults.

The wardens knew who within their area was on an ASBO or ABC, and what their terms were. Wardens reported any contravention of those orders, and were sometimes asked by the police to check, for example, that someone on an ASBO was not hanging around in a prohibited area. ASB investigators also sometimes called on neighbourhood wardens.

6.14 Liaising with housing and other services (Duties 3, 7, 10)

The wardens provided information to the council about local problems. They were also expected to pass on requests, queries and complaints from tenants to housing services and vice versa. Housing officers and managers frequently described the wardens as their ‘eyes and ears’. Wardens also liaised with other local public services and agencies, for example:

- working on environmental issues with the council’s gardeners
- providing information to the police and City Patrol
- referring residents to the fire service for home fire safety checks to fire stations, under written partnership agreements. Wardens also told fire stations about local fire hazards; for example, the presence of squatters in derelict buildings.
- telling social services about local children who were being abused or were otherwise at risk
- giving information (concerning the needs, problems and concerns of local young people) and practical help to the youth service
- visiting and working with schools. Wardens gave talks to students on local issues, and met school staff to discuss specific problems – for example, individuals loitering at the school gates.

6.15 Providing practical support to residents (Duty 2)

Some wardens felt that supporting local residents was the most important part of their job; one senior warden said wardens should act like ‘the good neighbour that used to live next door’. Many wardens attended local tenants’ or residents’ associations and provide them with practical help. Some wardens did minor repairs and other work (putting up curtain rails, fixing a broken fence or basic gardening) at the homes of obviously vulnerable residents – on the grounds that if they didn’t, no one else would.

One warden focused on the most marginalised people in her area: sex workers, dependent drug users and homeless people. She spent much of her time trying to engage with them and help them get support and treatment, until threats of violence forced her to work in a different neighbourhood.

6.16 Organising ‘Junior Neighbourhood Wardens’ (not specifically mentioned in duties)

The Junior Neighbourhood Wardens scheme was launched because of concerns about the lack of diversionary activities for young children in Southampton. Neighbourhood wardens organised a series of one-day events for 8- to 12-year-olds, centring on activities such as litter-picking, graffiti-removal, gardening, recycling work and visits to fire stations. The children who attended received rewards such as baseball caps. The Junior Neighbourhood Warden events proved immensely popular, and the wardens who were most closely involved spent increasingly more of their time on ‘The Juniors.’

7 Overall activity pattern

The wardens did engage in all the activities listed in their job descriptions (and some that weren’t). The amount of time devoted to the various activities differed widely. Analysis of wardens’ activity records showed that the largest amount of the wardens’

time was spent on activities that could broadly be described as environmental (Table 4).

Table 4 Categorisation of key warden activities

Aim	Rank order of warden time	Associated activities
Improve the environment	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking, cleaning and graffiti removal • Repairs • Removal of litter, bulk refuse and abandoned vehicles • Horticultural work • Supporting enviro-crime enforcement and prevention • Multi-agency improvement projects
Build community confidence	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a visible presence • Liaison with housing and other services • Providing practical support to residents • Running Junior Neighbourhood Wardens • Undertaking other youth work
Reduce of crime/ASB and fear of crime/ASB	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patrolling • Responding to minor ASB and neighbour disputes • Installing security lights, locks and gates • Providing information to police • Providing information to/working with City Patrol • Removing drugs litter and providing reports • Removing rubbish and abandoned vehicles (to reduce arson) • Removing graffiti • Working with youth • Supporting ASBOs and ABCs • Participating in CREW weeks • Other

Source: Stockdale et al 2005, Tables C1 and C2

This was consistent with the wardens' job description, which focused on environmental duties. The data we examined were not detailed enough to allow a percentage breakdown of warden time by activity, but a council-provided summary of wardens' activity in two of the evaluation areas indicated that over 2004/5 the proportion of the wardens' (including senior wardens') time spent on environmental work was 61% in Thornhill and 78% in Outer Shirley. The focus of the wardens' environmental work differed to some extent depending on whether their patch contained predominantly council or private housing. In areas of private housing, wardens had to do most cleaning and repair tasks themselves (or jointly with private landlords and residents), whereas in areas of council housing they could, at least in theory, ask other council services to do it.

Many Southampton wardens spent the largest single chunk of their time on cleaning and similar activities, even though it was probably the least demanding activity in terms of skills. Why was this? There are several possibilities:

- The wardens and/or their managers believed that cleaning was the highest priority activity in their areas
- Wardens preferred cleaning to other activities
- Cleaning yielded an obvious and immediate result, while dealing with other neighbourhood problems—for example, delinquent youth—was less immediately rewarding
- Residents or housing managers complained about graffiti and filth, and wardens responded to their complaints
- Cleaning was a ‘default activity’ that allowed wardens to keep an eye on developments in their patch while doing something productive at the same time.

After environmental and cleaning work, the wardens spent most time on community work, broadly defined. This included the Junior Wardens programme, which was not specifically mentioned in the wardens’ job description (indeed, youth work generally was not mentioned). The Junior Wardens were taking an increasing amount of wardens’ time.

Crime and disorder work was originally supposed to account for about 40% of wardens’ time, according to one police inspector. While we could not determine with much accuracy what percentage of their time wardens spent on each activity, the proportion of time spent *exclusively* on crime and disorder was clearly much less than 40%. According to activity summaries compiled by the council, wardens spent less than 4% of their time in 2004/05 dealing with crime or noise (the categories that correspond most closely to crime and ASB).

While reduction of crime and fear of crime were among the main aims of the scheme, it was always accepted that wardens would accomplish them indirectly—that reduction in crime and fear of crime were for the most part side effects (albeit important side effects) of their activities in general. It is important to establish what the wardens did *not* do in this area. They did not do any law-enforcement—that was the preserve of the police and City Patrol, and wardens were actively discouraged from playing an enforcement role. Wardens did not intervene in violent situations, and had no power to make arrests.

The wardens’ activities may have some unwelcome secondary effects. For example, one potential consequence of having wardens who will either clear up an estate themselves or arrange for others to do so, is that people are encouraged to drop more litter, to dump their cars and/or electrical goods, or otherwise damage the appearance and quality of the environment.

8 Costs of wardens compared to alternative provision

The average salary cost for a warden, including National Insurance and retirement provision, was about £25,000 in 2005. There were also a range of direct costs, the most important of which was the provision of a vehicle for each warden, which cost

about £4,570. Including all overheads and other costs, the average total cost per warden was about £36,500.

This makes wardens substantially more expensive to the council than other workers with similar training, or who do work similar to what the wardens spend much of their time doing. As Table 5 shows, the cost of employing the average warden is around 60% more than employing a cleaner, 25-40% more than employing a council repair officer or litter picker; and 17% more than a waste-collection loader.

Table 5: Estimated salary costs of neighbourhood wardens vs. other council employees

Job title	Salaries and on-costs			
	Per annum	Per week	Per hour	Total costs (36% overhead)
Senior City Patrol officer	£23,500	£450	£12.00	£32,000
Senior neighbourhood warden	£22,500	£435	£11.60	£30,600
Large goods vehicle driver	£18,700	£360	£9.59	£25,430
Neighbourhood warden (average)	£18,400	£354	£9.43	£25,000
City Patrol officer (average)	£18,400	£354	£9.43	£25,000
Drivers	£16,000	£308	£8.20	£21,750
Litter picker/area repairer (average)	£15,175	£292	£7.78	£20,638
Litter pickers/area repairer (Grade 4)	£13,100	£252	£6.72	£17,820
Cleaners	£11,650	£224	£5.97	£15,845

Source: Stockdale et al 2005, Table 10.4

Neighbourhood wardens are thus more expensive than specialists doing similar jobs—in terms of salaries, vehicles and probably management.

9 Conclusions

Four issues emerge from this study of warden activities.

- **Holistic vs single-task employees**

The open-endedness and flexibility of the wardens' role in Southampton was in many ways a strength. Because the wardens had the freedom to undertake an immensely wide range of tasks, they could provide a highly responsive service, doing work that was really needed.

This open-endedness also brought some problems. It sometimes was difficult to monitor and manage the wardens' activities. Among the wardens themselves, and within other services, there was some confusion - and resulting tension - about what the wardens could and could not do, and which service was responsible for what. And a highly flexible warden system could also be, in practice, a highly inconsistent one. The fundamental flexibility of the approach needs to be combined with a clear delineation of what wardens can do and what they cannot do.

Analysis of the wardens' activities suggested that they spent much of their time doing relatively low-skill tasks such as cleaning. It could be argued that that public money would be better spent on hiring more cleaners (at a much lower rate of pay) than on

using wardens to clean. Cleaning may be an appropriate ‘default activity’—after all, there is always something that needs cleaning, and it gives wardens a reason to be active in any area of their patch. But if wardens were relieved of all responsibility for cleaning, then their ‘default activity’ could be something else that provided higher social value and made better use of their skills. On the other hand, this would dilute the concept of the flexible wardens who could respond to any and all local problems—and the most obvious problem in many areas of Southampton was rubbish, graffiti and general dirt.

- **Management and direction**

The supercaretaker type of warden developed out of the traditional local authority housing caretaker, and these wardens are still generally managed by housing managers. This may no longer be appropriate, given that they now cover areas of private housing and business as well as local-authority housing. Southampton housing managers were so busy with other things that their management of wardens tended to be rather distant—in many cases they just trusted them to get on with whatever work was necessary.

In Southampton the wardens appeared to make decisions about time allocation in different ways—some followed set routines; others were ‘firefighters’, tackling whatever seemed to be the worst problem on the day; others preferred to work on long-term projects. There seemed to be relatively little input from supervisors. Those in charge of warden programmes should provide more guidance of a strategic nature—are wardens there to deal with a neighbourhood’s big problems, or the little ones that fall between the cracks? long-term problems or immediate ones?—so that all wardens are working towards the same strategic goals.

The Southampton wardens themselves were enthusiastic and committed, and seemed to derive great satisfaction from their jobs. Over the long term it may not be possible to recruit only people for whom such work is a vocation, so clear incentive structures should be designed.

- **Crime/ASB**

Reducing crime and ASB was one of the three main goals of the Southampton neighbourhood wardens (and was perhaps the single most important goal of neighbourhood warden schemes nationwide). The Southampton wardens devoted very little time *specifically* to this sort of work—it was always recognised that reduction of crime and ASB would generally be a secondary effect of their other activities. However, little thought seemed to have been given to which sorts of activity would have the strongest secondary effects.

- **Cost**

Wardens are costlier than other ways of providing the same services, but they are also very popular. Local politicians support warden schemes and are prepared to pay for them—after the expiration of central government funding, local authorities have generally been prepared to continue to fund programmes from their own resources.

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