



Report of the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods

Executive Board

Date: 14th May

Subject: Graffiti Strategy

Electoral Wards Affected:

All Wards

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In
(Details contained in the report)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Graffiti Strategy has been developed in order to create a structured and united approach to tackling graffiti across Leeds. Previously, many agencies were involved with graffiti, but lacked a coordinated approach to tackling the issues. Often there were conflicting ideas and approaches to dealing with the graffiti itself, potential offenders, re-offenders, victims etc.

The Strategy provides a framework within which distinct policies and action plans can be developed and carried out through partnership working.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek approval for the Graffiti Strategy, (attached)

2.0 Background Information

2.1 The Strategy has been developed in response to new powers brought in by the Clean Neighbourhoods & Environments Act 2005 to tackle graffiti and to set out the Council's stance on the problem and surrounding issues.

2.2 This Act amended the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003, introducing the use of Defacement Notices against statutory undertakers who were failing to clean graffiti from their assets within acceptable timescales and acceptable standards. These powers are in addition to those provided for under the Town & Country Planning Act 1990, (for use on private premises such as businesses) and the Fixed Penalty Notices (ASB Act 2003) that can be served on offenders caught in the act.

2.3 The legislation and guidance highlighted the need for a more concerted effort by agencies to take a joint working approach to tackling graffiti, its causes and how to reduce and prevent it in the future.

2.4 Graffiti is a constant problem and will never be completely eradicated. It has an anti establishment culture that attracts many young people because it offers a quick and easy outlet with maximum visual impact.

2.5 The Strategy clearly identifies the Council's aims and these will be met through continuous multi-agency working.

3.0 Main Issues

3.1 Graffiti causes huge problems to the Local Authority and community in terms of damage to the environment; clean up costs; an increase in perceived levels of crime and anti social behaviour; a reduction in community pride etc.

3.2 The Strategy was developed through consultation with different agencies, such as West Yorkshire Police (WYP), Integrated Youth Support Services and British Transport Police (BTP).

3.3 Consultation identified particular stumbling blocks to successful partnership working. For example, WYP, BTP and LCC were not working together as efficiently as possible when it came to identifying hotspot areas, repeat offenders and intelligence sharing. Through a dedicated sub group these issues are now being addressed and effective intelligence sharing methods are being established.

3.4 Other issues identified were conflicting tensions between agencies. Integrated Youth Support Services for example, held concerns that young people showing an early interest in graffiti were not criminalized and that diversionary measures were put into place. In consequence, an all encompassing approach to tackling graffiti has been established. In addition to enforcement action, plans are being developed to establish diversionary projects. The first of these, a 10 week project, started in April 2008 in the Inner North West area of Leeds, the area that is statistically the worst affected by graffiti.

- 3.5 Other aims of the Strategy are to encourage community ownership and responsibility for tackling graffiti. To that end, a pilot scheme for community clean off kits will be implemented. Bio-degradable, non toxic cleaning kits will be distributed to members of the community suffering from the blight of graffiti, to tackle smaller cleaning jobs. This will empower the community and in some cases speed up removal time and offer a further deterrent to potential and re-offenders.
- 3.6 The strategy refers to domestic property and the legal responsibility for graffiti removal from this type of property. It is recognized that people whose property is defaced by graffiti are the victims of crime, so it is important to work with owner-occupiers to support them in removing graffiti, particularly in those areas which are frequently affected. The use of the kits above is one way, but the Council will seek to work with the resident and its partner agencies, in particular the Police through the Neighbourhood policing Teams; Anti Social Behaviour teams and District Community safety partnerships. The Council has removed graffiti in areas of local need and deprivation, and this will continue to be considered in the light of funding availability.
- 3.7 The Strategy sets out the Council's intention to use the media. In practice actions such as "name a tagger" poster campaigns are being piloted. Furthermore, any successful enforcement action will be reported through local media wherever possible.
- 3.8 The Council, WYP and Integrated Youth Support Services are working together to develop an enforcement policy that ensures a uniform response regardless of which agency takes the lead on a case.
- 3.9 Another key theme is to encourage partnership working with statutory undertakers to acknowledge their responsibilities in tackling graffiti on their assets. This is being achieved through voluntary written agreements with the undertakers in the Leeds area. Discussions have been commenced with each undertaker and most agreements became operational at the end of April 2008. Those that may be reluctant can be served with a Defacement Notice stating the expectations required of them.
- 3.10 The Strategy also addresses educational aspects to the problem of graffiti. This has been translated, in practice, into regular school presentations explaining the related offences, penalties, financial cost to the community and the negative environmental impact. These presentations are soon to be expanded slightly, to incorporate a police input.
- 3.11 Throughout the development of the Strategy, Executive and Lead Members were consulted and the North West Inner Area Committee were asked for their opinions.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

- 4.1 The Strategy is unlikely to have any impact on Council policies that would necessitate them being reviewed or amended. It acknowledges and supports some Council Policies in its implementation, for example, environmental policies have been considered in the use of products included in community graffiti removal kits.
- 4.2 The strategy contributes to the strategic outcome to secure a thriving placing to live in by reducing crime, fear of crime, offending and anti social behaviour. It will help provide a stronger community by fostering a sense of pride and increasing the

number of people taking a local interest in their community. It will help provide a cleaner, greener and attractive city by addressing neighbourhood problem sites.

- 4.3 The strategy does recognize that intelligence about graffiti, both the identification of offenders and the location of hotspots or favoured targets, is helped through close links with local communities. This can be achieved through the strengthening relationships between the new area management teams and working on information from the public and representatives of Area Committees, parish councils etc.

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

- 5.1 In implementing the Strategy, it is likely that there will be an increase in enforcement action and diversionary measures. Legal action will be sought in every case where this is considered an appropriate course of action.
- 5.2 In some instances, we will be liaising with West Yorkshire Police and the Crown Prosecution Service to prosecute offenders for criminal damage. However, there will be a number of cases in which civil legal action is taken in addition to or instead of criminal prosecution. As a result there will be an increase in referrals to the Legal Department and subsequent costs.
- 5.3 It is also likely that as the Strategy is implemented and positive works are brought to the attention of the public and other agencies, there will be an increase in reports and enforcement cases. This may result in a temporary additional pressure on existing services.
- 5.4 In 2007/8, Leeds City Council spent £654,370 on graffiti removal, excluding enforcement and investigation costs by internal and external agencies. Less than half of this was recovered through charging and grants. The increased enforcement, education and diversionary measures outlined in the Strategy should see decreasing cleaning costs as incidents decrease and the possibility of some costs being recovered from organisations such as statutory undertakers.
- 5.5 A significant amount of the current funding for graffiti removal comes from NRF – in 2007/8, £217,000. This additional NRF funding allowed us to provide a free service to some domestic properties to remove graffiti; we obviously need to review this as the NRF funding we receive ceases in 2010. As the NRF funding reduces, we need to ensure that we pursue other opportunities for money to fund graffiti removal e.g. from Town and Parish Councils, Area Committees, private businesses etc. The service will also look to see whether there are opportunities to provide an ‘at cost’ service to both domestic and commercial properties. Criteria for the provision of fees and subsidised services will need to be established in the light of the funding available.

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 The Graffiti Strategy clearly sets out the Council’s stance on graffiti and its aims in reducing and tackling the problem. These aims are being met through the implementation of projects and schemes, case work and improved partnership working designed to add substance to the Strategy and offer tangible, practical means of assessing progress and improvement.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 It is recommended that the Executive Board approve the Graffiti Strategy.