

Creating Co-operative Street Services



Context

To overcome a £64.5 million funding gap over the next three years, Plymouth City Council (PCC) is reshaping their role and relationship with local communities to better manage demand for services. This plays a key part in PCC's approach to creating co-operative Street services. The services included parking, highways, street cleansing, parks and grounds management, marine services, and waste collection and disposal

PCC has a track-record of engaging communities and working collaboratively with partners to better understand and address the underlying causes of need. During 2010 – 2011, PCC took a highly consultative and collaborative approach to working with residents, Plymouth University and neighbourhood policing teams to improve the street-scene and reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the Mutley Greenbank neighbourhood. The environment in Mutley Greenbank was shaped by the transient population - particularly by the ebb and flow of the student population at the beginning and end of terms, and the influx of people into the night time economy towards the end of each week.

The benefits included reduced ASB and street-drinking, cleaner streets – and an increase (from 22 per cent to 30 per cent) in resident's belief that they can influence local services. The resulting fall in ASB reports and call-outs was estimated to be worth up-to £150,000 per year, and the insights and learning created informs their current co-operative ethos.

Objective

The vision the co-operative Street Services project is pursuing is to:

“Create pioneering living streets and open spaces in which our citizens, businesses and third sector partners play a part by shaping and delivering services for their community.”

Approach

PCC are implementing a co-operative approach to transforming Street Services by:

- Engaging residents and communities to co-design and co-produce outcomes with officers and councillors
- Integrating a range of functions and services to better anticipate and respond to need. Services integrated into Street Services now include parking, highways, street cleansing, parks and grounds management, marine services, and waste collection and disposal

- Aligning management structures with ward boundaries to strengthen the relationship between residents, councillors, operatives and managers and better target demand

To this end, PCC divided up the city into five areas, named “BOCAs” after Plymouth’s identity as Britain’s Ocean City. Each BOCA comprises 6 or 7 wards, has average populations of 65,000 and is co-terminous with ward boundaries to foster even stronger relationships with elected members, communities, business, partners and the third sector. Four senior officers have a lead role in community engagement and co-ordination of street service activity covering each of the four BOCA areas, and each BOCA has a newly created Area Supervisor.

In addition to being responsible for all matters and resources on cleansing, grounds, parks and open spaces, these new Area Supervisors are also responsible for all matters of health and safety.

Where possible, the new service devolves decision-making processes away from officers, seeking input from all appropriate stakeholders. A range of mechanisms facilitate engagement, including ward walkabouts, ‘Have Your Say’ forums, and meetings with partner agencies such as Plymouth Community Homes.

As part of the new structures, service managers come together twice a month for “Way Forward” meeting, where the different services which now form Street Services come together to share problems and ideas. For example, waste collection has highlighted streets where their trucks have access difficulties due to parking and the parking teams have taken steps to reduce these incidence.

The new service was launched in late 2014 however, the new co-operative approach has already had an effect on the shape of services.

Re-configuring collections around inner-city schools

Local knowledge is critical to identifying the causes behind issues. One opportunity to reconfigure collection services was identified during a ward walkabout. These bring a range of officers from Street Services and housing together with councillors and residents a particular locale. PCC now convene walkabouts monthly as part of their community outreach and engagement process.

At one of these ward walkabouts residents complained that the timing and routing of the bin collection lorries in the vicinity of inner-city schools, highlighting that the trucks typically pulled-up outside school at 8:45am causing major access issues for parents going to and from schools. Having learnt about the problem from residents, PCC convened a task and finish group which engaged parents, staff and teachers at the school and the residents living in the neighbourhood to help design a solution.

As a result, bin collection in the streets surrounding a number of inner-city schools has been rescheduled to a better time, and aligned with street cleansing - so that

immediately after the bins are emptied the streets are cleaned. Previously, there had been a 36 hour lag between the two services. Residents get a better, tailored solution – while the re-optimised route reduces the downtime and fuel costs of collection. This also demonstrates PCC’s readiness to shift their working patterns to take account pockets of specific need in the city.

Engaging residents to co-produce a better environment

PCC’s work in Mutley Greenbank in 2011 demonstrated how “door-knocking” - and other approaches to directly engage residents proactively - over a sustained period of time can help to build trust and create individual solutions to problems that have existed for many years.

One door-knocking exercise sought to address long-term problems arising in a lane that was narrow and easily blocked. Getting a refuse vehicle down the laneway was often impossible, meaning operatives had to manually transport 40 wheelie bins 50 to 60 metres to the truck. And a missed bin would cause a cascade of issues with pests and vermin due to the bins – which were often overflowing – tipping over. This scene would in turn attract further fly tipping – which then became a no-go area for local residents.

Having knocked on doors and engaged residents in conversations, the operations teams worked with residents to develop a different site collection regime whereby residents agreed to use communal bins located at either end of the laneway. Residents now carry their bags up-to 25 metres for each collection, but in return they get to use a clear and clean laneway.

“Residents were prepared to do things differently, if it meant they enjoyed a better local environment. But we’d never asked them before. We never said “if there’s a way forward, would you work with us to solve this?””

Partnering with Communities

As part of their co-operative approach to reshaping the role and responsibilities of the Council, PCC handed over stewardship of Ham Wood to a group of 100 residents who are now called “Friends of Ham Wood”. The wood is situated between two areas of social deprivation and had been adversely affected by vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

The group took over responsibility for the Wood three years ago. The group has organised regular litter clearing, won funding to build two kilometres of pathways and attracted funding from the Art Council to create *In Praise of Trees* (pictured below). Since then the Wood became the first woodland area in the South West to achieve green flag status, and recently won an award from the Police for their reduction in Anti-Social Behaviour



The sculpture marks the spot where on Boxing Day 2011 the largest and oldest oak tree in Ham Woods came down in a storm, destroying some very ancient stone walling. The response of the council would have been to send in a digger and truck to remove the disrupted materials.

Instead, Friends of Ham Woods applied for and won funding from the Arts Council to salvage the slate bricks and reuse the materials to create a sculpture *In Praise of Trees*, which has become a focal point in the Wood. The slates from the wall were salvaged and used, the oak formed the bench.

The community group brought ideas, and access to funding opportunities that were not available to PCC.

By handing over responsibility for the asset to the community, PCC has reduced demand on resources while releasing the ideas and energies of local people to create public value.

Tapping people power

During November 2015 PCC piloted an approach to giving people a sense of place which brought together a range of services including highways, public protection, waste, street cleansing, and parks in a concerted “month of action” focused on Stonehouse, an inner-city neighbourhood.

The area was known for habitual fly tipping, flyposting and graffiti. With resources tight, the intention is to help people understand what is and isn't acceptable from an environmental point of view - and what information the Council needs in order to be able to act.

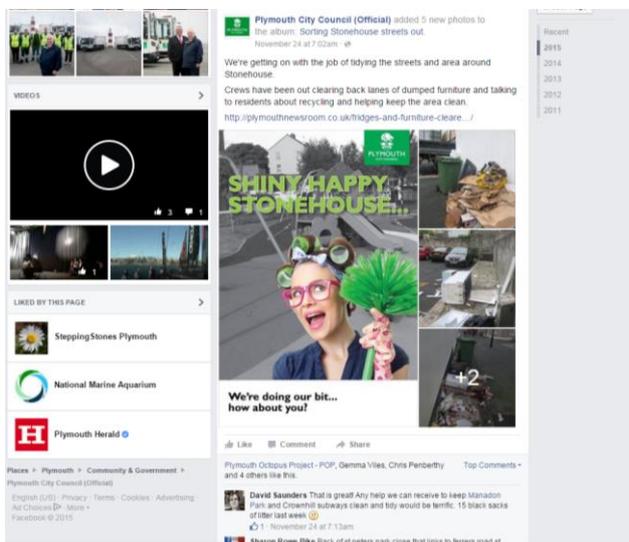


The Council has a hit list of problems to tackle throughout the “Month of Action”. It includes:

- removing fly tipping from Council-owned land
- investigating abandoned vehicles
- removing a bottle bank so less rubbish is dumped next to it
- painting street furniture, such as the ornamental lights, bollards and seats to make them look smart – this will be carried out by a charity that works with ex-offenders and the Probation Service
- Tidying up back streets by removing unused wheelie bins which have been abandoned
- Cleaning graffiti from Council owned land

Building on the insights generated by PCC’s work in Mutley Greenbank, the aim of the “Month of Action” is for the public to become the “eyes and ears” of the Council, and that when they report an issue something is seen to be done - making them more likely to report problems in the future. Being able to rectify problems quickly - before they escalate and become significant - will enable the community and the Council co-operatively deliver a better local environment.

It’s all about winning hearts and minds, and the pilot scheme has received such a positive response from local people that PCC are now planning to apply it to other areas.



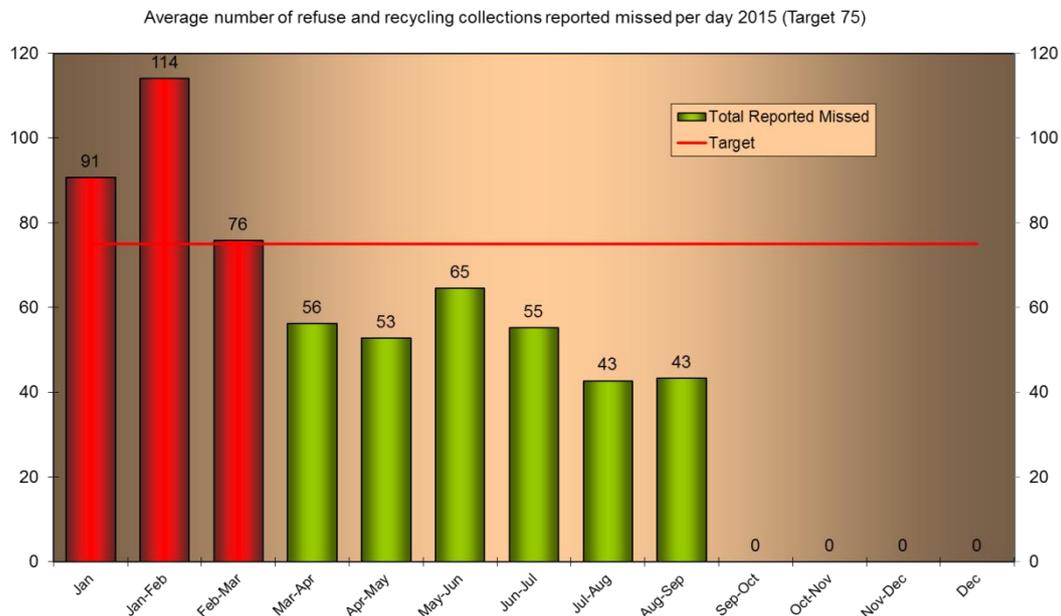
Outcomes

The service re-design and management re-structure of the service now comprising street scene saved PCC approximately £500,000 last year, while the redesign and alignment of operations in parks and ground maintenance alone saved the council £340,000.

A major part of PCC’s cooperative approach is to engage residents in conversations about what they can expect from the Council, and what the Council expects from them. Since a missed bin is partly a function of whether and where the bin is made available to collect, the number of missed collections per day is an indicator of how effective PCC’s door-knocking and wider engagement have been.

In recent years PCC set themselves a demanding target of no more than 75 reported missed collections per day PCC’s Environmental Services collects refuse and recycling from an average of 43,207 households per day and has to collect from over 99.83% of these in order to meet the target. This equates to missing less than one bin in every 576 or each crew missing less than 4 bins per round per day.

As the graph below shows, the number of missed bins has been steadily decreased to their lowest reported ever since PCC launched the cooperative Street Services .



PCC will have reduced the number of missed bins by half, year to year – which could save the council over £30,000 per year.

Challenges & Lessons Identified

- The fundamental challenge going forward is to continue to deliver effective services, and innovate ways to deliver these so more efficient while the available finances continue to be reduced.
- Keeping engagement with both staff and residents to sustain momentum is an on-going challenge. Engagement requires time, energy and attention.
- Ensuring Ward Councillors are kept informed and supported is critical.

Next steps

Based on their experience of applying engagement techniques to optimise waste collection, PCC are now applying the same approach to optimise street cleansing.

Following the success of the “Month of Action” in Stonehouse, PCC will be rolling out the approach to other areas of the City.

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