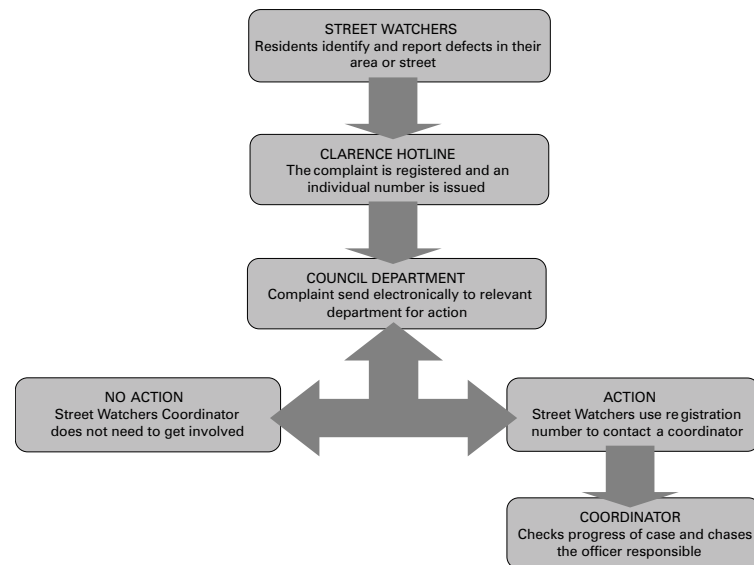


BOX 6.8 WALTHAM FOREST: STREET WATCHERS*Simplified Street Watchers process*

contractors before action is taken, or other agencies i.e. (electricity companies for street lighting) who do not necessarily share the council's priorities. Residents, however, do not distinguish between different agencies or departments.

Street Watchers started in 2000 following a suggestion from a 'Citizens' Jury' to involve residents more in council activities. Originally set up within the Highways Maintenance Section, it was subsequently transferred to Customer Services acting as an extension to their free-phone hotline. The post of Street Watchers coordinator is therefore customer-focused and perceived to be independent from service delivery.

Initially, the pilot involved twelve residents and 400 defects were reported in the first six months of operation. The scheme's long-term success was assured by the borough-wide expansion of Street Watchers to 224 volunteers (the objective being eventually to have one for every street). Recruitment of volunteers is through the local press and attendance at events, and on joining they are equipped with information packs and relevant contacts. The initiative has so far failed to engage young persons and ethnic minority volunteers, and to redress the balance the council will be targeting these groups in future. It has nevertheless resulted in an improved environment by bringing problems to the council's attention before they become serious.

The Street Watchers initiative in Waltham Forest comprises local volunteers who report on problems affecting their immediate environment, but which relies for its success on the enhanced coordination of the follow-up delivery mechanisms. The initiative integrates with mainstream management but remains at arm's length from council operations; the only contact being the Street Watchers coordinator who is responsible for the interface between the Street Watchers and service delivery through routine programmes. The initiative has led to improved services by keeping the pressure on officers to deliver.

As most enforcement powers are within the same directorate, matters reported by the Street Watchers relating to private premises or land (i.e. overhanging vegetation, fly-tipping, abandoned cars) can be dealt with quickly. However, delays in response times can arise when action involves other directorates who need to contact their own

for example, has introduced, via a new byelaw, a licensing scheme for businesses which distribute free literature around the city. Birmingham have a 'Street Entertainment Policy' that identifies official 'Busk Stops' in the city, and employ an 'Alternative Giving Strategy' to reduce begging. Finally, Coventry and Great Yarmouth have taken advantage of powers in the 2001 Criminal Justice and Police Act to establish alcohol-free zones in previous problem areas.

Local authorities also identified vehicle abandonment, fly-tipping, littering and dog fouling as further areas in need of greater powers for control. Waltham Forest 'Street Watchers' programme tries to do this, by engaging members of the local community to act as the eyes and ears of the council, picking up problems – both actual and potential – and reporting to officers who are then able to respond more quickly than if they had to wait for scheduled inspection visits (Box 6.8). This has proved to be effective for improving services like street cleansing, refuse collection, abandoned vehicle and graffiti removal, and the control of fly tipping,

but depends on very good relationships between the volunteers and the relevant officers. Westminster has brought together enforcement powers under the Leicester Square Enforcement Initiative, where cross-council departments, the police, a specific Leicester Square Action Team, and the Leicester Square Wardens combine to create an integrated enforcement team to tackle problems.

Authorities tended to express frustration with the tardy response of some government agencies to public space matters, in particular the Environment Agency, Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), and National Rail, and argued that powers should be devolved from central government and its agencies. Southwark even supplied a specific list of powers that would improve the authority's management of public space, including signing a joint agreement between the borough and the Environment Agency on information sharing, the power to seize those vehicles identified as being involved in fly tipping, which would enable them to interview owners and if necessary prosecute, and powers