Community Wardens in Scotland - Practitioners' Views

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Abstract: Community Wardens in Scotland have had a positive impact on anti-social behaviour and environmental problems since their introduction in 2003. There are a number of models throughout the council areas and cultural and acceptance difficulties exist with some police and partner agencies but the public in general are happy with the service. Issues surrounding funding, enforcement and accountability still need to be resolved.

Introduction

The present study focuses on Community Wardens in Scotland who have no police powers, unlike Police Community Support Officers in England and Wales. In 2003 the Scottish Executive provided £20 million to enable the development of a Community Warden Scheme in all 32 local authority areas. In 2007 there were around 550 Wardens officially funded. While not a replacement for the police, they are, according to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland an extra resource which provides a 'reassuring presence to local people, promoting community safety and community development' (HMCIC 2006: 25). As there is a degree of flexibility in the design and organization of Community Warden Schemes, local authorities produced their own versions based on local needs. As a consequence, a variety of models now exist across Scotland that primarily deal with crime prevention or environmental improvement or embrace both.

Community Wardens are characterised as a "uniformed, semi-official presence in a residential area with the aim of improving quality of life" (Scottish Executive 2003: 8). Wardens are not police officers, but the two groups do have common aims that necessitate a close working partnership. That said, in Scotland the police have no management control over Wardens, who are local authority employees, except for three Warden schemes in the Grampian area, which are run by the police.

Wardens were launched under the catchphrase of being the 'eyes and ears of the community' with a remit to improve the links between the public and partnership agencies. High visibility uniform patrol and responding quickly and efficiently to community concerns is a major part of their function. Evidence to date suggests Warden schemes have helped to reduce crime, fear of crime, anti-social behaviour and improve the overall quality of the environment (Crawford et al 2004, 2005); DCLG 2006; Doran 2003; Fife Council 2007; Neighbourhood Wardens Unit 2000; Scottish Executive 2007; Smithson & Armitage 2007; Stevenson 2006).

Method

The present research sought to examine the views of Community Wardens and compare the implementation of Community Wardens with that of community policing. These objectives were aimed at producing a broad picture of Community Warden Schemes across Scotland. The general consistency found in the content of responses and views between city and rural or large and small schemes, led to the possibility of speaking of the Wardens as a clearly homogeneous group. The adoption of this approach facilitated a national perspective on Wardens and enables a better understanding of the positive and negative issues requiring debate and discussion.

A central element of the research was a questionnaire survey of Community Wardens and their Managers, designed to elucidate the attitudes, opinions and perceptions of Wardens. An important part of the study was the interviewing of a random number of Warden Scheme Managers, which offered a wider range of information and opinion on the topics being discussed. Officials at the Scottish Executive and police officers of various ranks were consulted, and a literature review of Community Wardens in the UK was also conducted.

Research took place between January and August 2007 and 21 of the 32 local authority Warden Schemes took part (Donnelly 2007). A self-completion questionnaire was administered to a target group of 480 Wardens in the 21 council areas and a total of 192 respondents took part (Table 1). This gave a response of 40%. Included in the total are 27 Managers, 17 of whom were also interviewed.

Table 1 Respondents by Council Areas

Council Areas	Wardens (respondents)	Total complement of Wardens in each council scheme	Manager / Supervisor (respondents)
Aberdeen City Council	8	30	1
Aberdeenshire Council	1	6	1
Angus Council	7	12	1
Argyll and Bute Council	0	6	1
City of Edinburgh Council	34	44	1
Clackmannanshire Council	1	8	1
Dundee City Council	23	50	1
East Ayrshire Council	15	23	1
East Dunbartonshire Council	10	12	3
East Renfrewshire Council	0	10	1
Glasgow City Council	8	56	1
Inverclyde Council	20	32	1
Moray Council	5	7	1
North Ayrshire Council	2	33	1
North Lanarkshire Council	1	36	1
Orkney Islands Council	0	4	1
Renfrewshire Council	9	58	2
Scottish Borders Council	2	5	1
Shetlands Islands Council	2	2	1
South Lanarkshire Council	9	36	3
Stirling Council	8	10	2

	TOTAL	165	480	27	

The questionnaires and interviews covered the following themes :-
* What types of work do Wardens do ?
* What training have you received and who trained you ?
* Do you work with the police ?
* Are relations with police satisfactory ?
* What other agencies/partners do you work with ?
* Are relations with agencies/partners satisfactory ?
* How are your relations with the public ?
* Are the public happy with the service given by wardens ?
* How would you rate the wardens impact on the community ?
* Is there other work you feel the wardens should do ?
* Do you feel your salary accurately reflects the work you do ?
* Should wardens acquire additional powers ?
* Should there be a national organisation similar to the police
  service ?

In addition to these themes the Community Wardens manager questionnaire included questions on funding and organisation of the Wardens service.

Community Wardens' Views

Based on the information given a selection of work presently being carried out by Wardens is listed in Table 2 which gives some insight into the extensive range of duties on offer by the Wardens schemes.

Table 2 Selection of Community Warden Work

1	Acceptable Behaviour Contracts	24	Litter
2	Advice to Citizens	25	Mediation
3	Anti-social Behaviour Complaints	26	Mobile Patrol
4	Assist Community Development	27	Monitor Vulnerable Residents
5	Environmental Improvements	28	Neighbourhood Disputes
6	Attend Community Events	29	Noise Disputes
7	Community Council Meetings	30	Operate Traffic Control System
8	Cycle Training	31	Partnership Working

9	Deter Crime	32	Prevent Vandalism
10	Dog Fouling	33	Professional Witness
11	Engender Community Wellbeing	34	Public Reassurance
12	Eyes and Ears of the Public and Police	35	Reduce Fear of Crime
13	Fly-tipping	36	Report Defective Street Furniture
14	Gardening Club	37	Reporting Issues to Council
15	Graffiti Cleansing	38	Restorative Warnings to Youths
16	High Visibility Patrolling	39	School Security
17	Hotspots Patrol	40	School Visits
18	Information and Intelligence Gathering	41	Sharps Removal (syringes)
19	Joint Visits and Patrols	42	Sheltered Housing Visits
20	Landlord and Janitorial Duties	43	Sports Coaching
21	Liaise with CCTV Unit	44	Stray Dogs
22	Liaise With Community Police	45	Variety of Talks
23	Liaise with Pupils	46	Youth Diversionary Projects

An examination of the wide range of partner agencies engaged with Wardens on a regular basis depicts the far-reaching scope of their involvement with community safety issues (see Table 3). The uniqueness and flexibility of the Wardens' position allows them to take part in multifarious activities in the community.

Table 3 Selection of Agencies engaged with Community Wardens

1	Animal Welfare	20	Housing Associations
2	Anti-social Investigation	21	Lands and Parks Services
3	British Transport Police	22	Local Businesses
4	British Waterways (Scot)	23	Mediation Services
5	CCTV Operators	24	Mental Health
6	Cleansing Department	25	National Health Service
7	Police / Community Police	26	Planning Department
8	Community Learning	27	Registered Landlords
9	Community Renewal Team	28	Roads and Lighting
10	Community Safety	29	SACRO
11	Community Services	30	Safer Scotland

12	Countryside Rangers	31	SEPA
13	Drugs Action Teams	32	Social Work
14	Education	33	Sports Officers
15	Environmental Health	34	Technical Services
16	Fire service	35	Victim Support
17	Harbour Trust	36	Workers' Groups
18	Homeless Unit	37	Youth Justice
19	Housing	38	Youth Workers

Although, Warden Schemes vary in size and workloads, an examination of the above Tables reveal the wide variety of work they carry out and how they have become an integral part in local community service.

Work with the Police
The vast majority of Wardens (80%) said they regularly work with the police whilst the remainder (19%) do so on 'occasions' and (1%) not at all. Not surprisingly, community police officers are the main interface with Wardens. Nearly three quarters of the Wardens believe their relationship with the police to be good, commenting that the existing protocols work well. The remaining 28% of Wardens either experienced problems 'sometimes' (10%) or stated that police relations were 'not good' (18%). Poor communication and an inadequate flow of information and feedback were identified as key problem areas.

A number of comments about working with the police were given by Wardens.

"Police could make more use of us as we have forged strong links with
 our communities and if they chose to they could tap into these links
 on a regular basis"

"We would like to hold regular meetings with the Community Police to
 forge better links and share best practice"

"Attitude of police is that we are not there"

"Police could make better use of our services and free up their time"

> "We have problems with police response times – could be quicker"

Most Community Warden managers believe the working relationships with the police are good, citing regular meetings with police liaison officers and local senior management. Some managers did admit that, in particular areas, the rapport with police and Wardens was not that good. In these instances the police officers involved were non-community police officers who did not have a regular interface with the Wardens. Similar comments have been made in other recent studies (Fife 2007; Scottish Executive 2007).

Some Schemes have dedicated police officers within anti-social behaviour/community warden units to assist in the exchange of information. In some Schemes the supervisors attend the police Tasking and Co-ordinating meetings and are regularly requested to target particular issues in their communities. Close liaison exists in many areas and in some Schemes dining with the police is encouraged to improve relationships. The development of Wardens as professional witnesses is generating better relationships between both groups. In one local authority area Wardens have received over 100 court citations in the past year, some of which have been for serious crimes. In some instances the police have commented there would have been no case but for the Wardens' involvement and testimony.

It is evident that at the beginning of the Warden Schemes there was a level of scepticism on both sides, but over time, as roles have become more defined, the police and Warden partnerships have worked well. There remain, however, pockets of scepticism in the police organisation.

Relations with Other Partners
The vast majority of Wardens believe that they have good relationships with the rest of their partners. Comment was made that some agencies are not fully aware of the Wardens' role and that better feedback and clearer lines of communication could improve partnership working. Wardens also have close relationships with local businesses, sheltered housing complexes, community and leisure activity complexes, and the voluntary sector. Most Wardens believe their relationships with the public are good despite the slowness of initial liaison processes in some areas. Wardens now feel that they are gaining trust and respect.

Although the public regularly stop and chat, Wardens commented that some of the community's expectations are too high due to their limited knowledge of the Wardens' powers and role. "The public look at us as community police and expect us to sort out things beyond our control", was one response. Typically, there are those in the community who believe the Wardens to be 'police grasses' and this leads to confrontation and abuse. "Some people on the estates do not want us there". Most Wardens find this easy to resolve.

An interesting feature of the positive public response to Wardens is the regular flow of information and intelligence imparted to them from community members who (according to the Wardens) would be unwilling to approach the police for a variety of reasons. It is also apparent that a number of communities would like the Wardens to be given more powers, with additional coverage on their leave days.

Wardens and their managers were asked if they believed that the public is happy with the service they give. 92% of respondents believed the public is generally happy with the Warden service. This is supported by the number of letters of appreciation received from the public and the positive results of departmental and independent surveys. The remaining 8% believe the public are unhappy with the service and relationships could be better with those community members who are frustrated with the Wardens' lack of powers and who do not, as yet, fully understand the Wardens' role. A customer care survey in one council area involved 500 questionnaires issued to persons who had used the service, over 90% of the responses were very positive.

Wardens' Impact
The vast majority of Wardens (93%) are convinced that they have made a difference to the well-being of their communities. The level of impact depends on the particular area and its problems. Most Wardens believe they have benefited their communities through their ability to tackle local problems quickly and efficiently – "the public can see us fast-tracking facilities and get repairs done quickly". Wardens are proud of their contribution to environmental improvement, although a number of Wardens feel they are less successful as a cheap form of crime prevention, blaming this failure on the limitations of their powers. However, many Wardens believe anti-social behaviour, vandalism, fly-tipping and litter have decreased as a direct result of their efforts. Wardens also give communities

someone to report things to, a voice that leads to effective communication links, joint working and ultimately improvements in the area.

One positive feature of the successful impact of Wardens is witnessed in those areas where additional numbers have been introduced as a result of public and political pressure – "those who do not have wardens want them". One independent public survey carried out in a council area reported the public as highly satisfied with Wardens' responses to reported incidents and 77% said the area was a better place to live compared to the period prior to the introduction of Community Wardens three years earlier. This is indicative of many independent surveys commissioned by local authorities, results of which generally came out in support of the Warden Schemes.

Managers are also convinced the Wardens' impact on the community has been considerable and that they are now an integral part of community life. They are seen as a useful and versatile resource, especially those who are trained as mediators, those who facilitate 'acceptable behaviour contracts' and those involved in restorative justice work. Wardens and managers believe each local council is fully supportive of their work, judging the overall impact of Wardens on the well-being of the community to be a success.

Additional Powers
Wardens were asked if they should acquire additional powers. Respondents are in two categories those with existing powers and those without, 57% are keen for more powers while 36% are not and 7% don't know. Of the 94 respondents wishing additional powers, one third already have fixed penalty powers, the other two thirds do not. There is an obvious confidence in both these groups to take on additional enforcement responsibility as they regularly come across situations when attending calls or on patrol that could be successfully resolved if they had the requisite powers. In addition, Wardens recited stories of communities continually reminding Wardens of their limitations due to lack of powers.

Responses from Wardens with powers who wish an increased enforcement role included: -

> * Definitely, as the public continually ask us to do things outside our
>   Remit

* We could do with more authority in particular areas of work

* Would be helpful to ask youths for their names and addresses

* Power to confiscate alcohol from under-age drinkers would be great

* Yes, for minor road traffic offences and speeding

* Combat urinating in public, vehicle excise offences and drinking in
  public

* Need powers similar to Police Community Support Officers in
  England

* Yes, to disperse groups of youths

* Yes, but limited powers so they are not abused

* Yes, but need to be careful not to become police officers

* Yes, but not a cheap alternative to police

* Yes, could be helpful to other agencies

* Yes, but need more support from police as we would be more
  vulnerable

* Yes, as we lose a lot waiting for the police to arrive

However, a substantial 36% or 59 Wardens are against a change in the status quo and of these one quarter already have powers and three quarters do not. The following responses were given :-

* Powers are sufficient as we have police back-up

* No - would lose our close relationship with the public

* Not a good idea only as last option

> * No - some already have fixed penalty powers for dog fouling and litter
>
> * We are trying to build community relations, this could be step backwards
>
> * No - it would lead to confrontation with the public
>
> * No - we are not at a stage where we can enforce new powers
>
> * Wardens achieve same aims through persuasion

Managers' views included –

> "Fixed penalty powers are sufficient Wardens are not the type for police powers"
>
> "Not in favour but we certainly need to standardise throughout Scotland"
>
> "Some council areas are due to get additional powers for dog fouling and litter"
>
> "No but can see it happening due to public pressure"
>
> "Not wanted or needed"

Of the 19 managers who do not support extra powers, 17 were from Schemes without powers and 2 had enforcement powers. Of those 8 managers who supported extra powers, 6 had no powers and 2 had powers.

At present there are a number of Schemes were wardens have fixed penalty powers for litter and dog fouling and additional council areas are hoping to introduce similar powers in the future. Managers in particular have mixed feelings about additional powers and some are opposed to an enforcement role other than for anti-social behaviour, believing it would have a negative impact on the community. The majority of managers believe fixed penalty powers are sufficient, citing low pay scales and limited skills and aptitudes of some Wardens as a barrier to additional responsibilities.

Clearly, there is an issue surrounding enforcement powers for Wardens at the local level and one requiring consideration and debate by all parties.

Funding

At the time of the research there was a 'cocktail' of funding for Wardens with financial support coming from the Scottish Government and a variety of local authority sources. The main funding from the Scottish Government ceases in March 2008 and there was a degree of apprehension as to what happens next, as a number of Warden Schemes would be unable to continue without sufficient funds. This uncertainty was cited as a major concern amongst Wardens and their managers. The absence of security of employment meant few local authorities had any meaningful medium to long-term plans involving Wardens. As one would expect, this lack of sustainability and continuity led to managerial and organisational difficulties for frontline managers who had to cope with a temporary workforce who are in 'limbo', not knowing if they would be in post the following year (Donnelly 2008).

Deployment and Accountability

The deployment of Wardens is based on levels of crime, anti-social behaviour and the targeting of complaints and concerns from local communities. Regular intelligence gathering also feeds into the system and facilitates Wardens' briefings and patrol strategies. However, while on patrol Wardens do have discretion and flexibility to prioritise their duties and are expected to use a great deal of common sense. Managers continually remind the Wardens to seek advice and guidance on any doubtful issues, but personal safety above all is paramount. The balance between proactive and reactive work is very dependent on the profile of the council area and the Wardens' powers.

At present Wardens are employees of the local authority and subject to local government employment, discipline and grievance procedures. This is unlike police officers who are governed by their own discipline and misconduct regulations and unique police 'complaints system'. There have been a number of Wardens disciplined in recent years for unacceptable conduct during the course of their duties. In these cases the individuals were disciplined under local authority regulations. The question of accountability

of Wardens could become a sensitive issue in the future if the Warden Schemes expand in size and additional powers are allocated.

Community Policing and Community Wardens

When community policing, as we know it, was introduced in the 1980s it was open to numerous definitions from academics, practitioners and members of the public. It was not a clear concept because it was not a simple marginal change to policing – it was a major cultural shift in the way the police operated. It involved a significant transformation since the onset of professional policing at the turn of the twentieth century (Brown & Iles 1985; Fielding 1994, 1995; Smith 1986, 1987; Weatheritt 1982, 1987). It placed police officers at the centre of the community and represented a change, not only in the way they thought about their work, but also in the way communities viewed policing methods in their localities. Similar comment can be made of the introduction of Community Wardens into the community as there are many analogous features between the two aims of crime prevention and community safety.

Although Wardens in Scotland do not possess police powers, their aims and objectives are identical in many respects to those of community police officers (CPOs). The list below is a selection of goals and objectives given by Community Wardens in their responses which coincide with those of CPOs.

Similarities in Goals and Objectives of CPOs and Community Wardens
* Pursuit of community well-being
* Act as 'eyes and ears' of the community and other agencies
* Reassure the public
* Improve quality of life in the community
* Link between public and service Agencies

* Assist speedy resolution of incidents

* Advise on matters of community safety

* High-visibility patrol

* Engender environmental improvement

* Deter crime and the fear of crime

* Report anti-social behaviour

* Support multi-agency and partnership initiatives

* Engage positively with young people

* Support and reassure victims of crime

* Facilitate Neighbourhood Watch Schemes

The literature on the development of community policing teaches that a successful community relations model should include a number of features and approaches if it is to achieve its desired aims. The following is a list of similarities in the work-related characteristics of CPOs and Wardens.

Similarities in the Occupational and Operational Context of CPOs and Community Wardens

* Flexibility of deployment

* Ability to take on extra non-police-related work

* Non-confrontational approach encouraged

* Gather Community and Crime Intelligence

* Majority of work is non-enforcement

* Major input into schools and locally run events

* Areas without CPOs/Wardens continually request coverage

* Strong links developed with local agencies, especially housing

* Need for coverage on days off, annual leave and sickness

* Gradual move from 'proactive' to 'proactive and reactive'

* Over time CPOs became enforcers due to public pressure and
  rising crime

* Lack of understanding of the roles of CPOs and Wardens by
  agencies, colleagues and public

* Communication problems with colleagues, public and other
  agencies

Many of the concerns experienced by CPOs in their early years also ring true for today's Community Wardens. For example, the present research positions Wardens on the threshold of a new approach to policing and community safety with visible street patrol no longer the sole domain of the sworn police officer. This raises the question of who should now be involved in local policing and what part might be played by auxiliaries such as Wardens ?

Conclusion

The present study illustrates how Community Wardens in Scotland have been flexible enough to reflect the needs of local communities. The absence of interference and tight control by the Scottish Government has led to a variety of models. This is understandable in the early years of the initiative. However, when dealing with enforcement measures in the public domain, a nationally co-ordinated, strategic and standardised approach to Community Wardens would now seem more appropriate. Such a move could be realised without interfering with the 'holy grail' of flexibility and decision making at the local level.

Senior police management in Scotland are supportive of Community Wardens, particularly if they are based within and employed by the local

authority. The general view is that Wardens have proved to be a useful resource and play a key role in the evolving 'extended police family'.

Community Wardens are a response to the constant need for more visible patrolling as it is highly unlikely extra police resources will find themselves tackling anti-social behaviour, dog fouling, litter, environmental and noise issues. In the past the police were rarely in a position to address these community problems, but as a result of the presence of Community Wardens there is now a group with a specific remit to tackle these issues.

As with community policing, a lot of the Wardens' work goes unseen, and although their efforts may not be perfect, they do have potential to invigorate communities, empower community members, facilitate environmental improvement and advance community safety. Wardens can be a conduit to involving young people and, more importantly, to engage those difficult to access minority groups in local decision making. They are a mechanism that offers a consistency of interface between partnership agencies and the public, giving community members more control over community safety issues in their area. A regular Warden Patrol system constantly interacting with the community is more representative than a 'community meeting' with 20 people or local partnership agencies making decisions on their own.

CPOs and Community Wardens play a leading role in community planning, social partnerships and community safety initiatives. In the past, the difficulty for the CPO was to achieve a balance between the role of law enforcer, accountable to the police organisation and to carry out non-enforcement duties within the community to whom accountability also lay. Community Wardens are likely to face this dilemma if enforcement powers increase. Similarly, new enforcement responsibilities and increased proficiency as witnesses could lead Wardens to increased court appearances and abstractions from their primary role as high visibility street patrollers – just like police officers.

It is not easy to assess the impact of Community Wardens as there are difficulties in evaluating the qualitative element to their work that does not lend itself to satisfactory measurement. However, the present account has referred to a number of comprehensive studies in Scotland and the rest of the UK which have substantiated an improved quality of life for communities as a result of interventions by Wardens.

Acknowledgement

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