



Belfast City Council

Report to: Health & Environmental Services Committee

Subject: **Review of Operation Clean-up**

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Relevant Background Information

Operation Clean Up is a Community Safety multi-agency partnership initiative between the Council, the Northern Ireland Office's (NIO) Community Safety Unit, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Driver & Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland (DVLNI, now DVA) and the Fire & Rescue Service. The scheme commenced in November 2004 and sought to (a) reduce and prevent criminal and antisocial behaviour by removing "runaround" cars from public roads and (b) reduce the number of unlicensed (and potentially uninsured) vehicles on the road. "Runaround" cars are usually low value vehicles which are untaxed (for more than three months), uninsured and are also disproportionately involved in traffic accidents and criminal activities.

Approval was initially granted by the Committee in May 2004 to support the initiative through the provision of land at Duncrue for the construction of a vehicle storage compound and to make a financial contribution to running costs if required.

The main funders of the scheme were the NIO, the PSNI and the Council. The Council's contribution was (i) the provision of a site at Duncrue for the vehicle storage compound and (ii) administration of the "Management of the Vehicle Storage Compound" contract and disposal of the unclaimed vehicles.

The scheme was officially due to finish on 30 April 2007. As it was seen to be effective however the partnership agreed that the scheme should continue, albeit the NIO stated that funding would be reduced. Although the scheme was partly self-financing it could not be sustained at its prevailing level without considerable additional funds. At the 12 March 2007 meeting, and following receipt advice from the Council's Legal Services Department, the partnership agreed that the scheme should reduce its hours of operation while funding options were investigated by the Police Retraining & Rehabilitation Trust (PRRT).

The PRRT study sought to identify possible partners and funding mechanisms for the continuation and further development of the scheme but, without considerable funding from the individual partners and a guarantee of a steady number of vehicles it was recognised as not being feasible.

In further discussions with the partners another option was identified using the national contract of the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) which could be used to remove untaxed vehicles from public access areas. The DVA has a contract with NCP Ltd to identify, clamp and remove untaxed vehicles. As there is considerable under-utilised capacity in the scheme it was agreed by the partnership that the PSNI and the Council could use the scheme. Instead of the PSNI arranging pickup of untaxed/runaround vehicles they would notify NCP who would clamp the vehicles or remove them immediately. NCP have three compounds for the storage of vehicles in NI which they manage in a similar manner to the Council vehicle compound at Duncrue.

To test this proposal a two week pilot (Operation Evader) was carried out in the Belfast area during which 320 vehicles were clamped or lifted. The PSNI identified untaxed vehicles and reported them to DVA and NCP. During the pilot the vehicles were either dealt with that day, or immediately thereafter if they were detected after 6 pm. The trial was a success and could be considered as a template of good practice with no major problems being experienced and no assaults on the police or NCP staff.

Key Issues

The current Operation Clean Up scheme was due to finish on 30 April 2007. As the partnership was eager for it to continue however it was operated at a reduced level to permit an investigation to be conducted into other possible funding mechanisms. The NIO indicated that they might provide reduced funding over the next three years. This funding would not permit the scheme to operate at the level it had achieved between 2004 and 2007.

Between 1 November 2004 and 30 April 2007 Operation Clean Up removed 6357 runaround vehicles, 4085 of which were destroyed. These were vehicles which had been associated with creeper burglaries, vehicle arson, filling station drive offs and hit-and-run collisions. During this time, the number of abandoned vehicles which the Council dealt with dropped from approximately 1500 to 250 vehicles per year. Removing the vehicles earlier meant that fewer vehicles were being abandoned after they had served their purpose. This indicated that many abandoned vehicles which the Council had previously addressed were runaround vehicles before their abandonment.

The Operation Clean Up scheme is widely recognised as good practice and it received an International Community Policing Award in 2005 and a NI Best Practice Award in 2008.

Since Operation Cleanup started, the DVA has established a national contract for dealing with untaxed vehicles which resulted in NCP Ltd being given authority to clamp and remove vehicles from public access areas. In NI, this contract has spare capacity and could be extended to deal with all reports of untaxed vehicles from the police. This would include runaround vehicles and vehicles which have been abandoned but are still capable of being driven on the public road. It would therefore be able to deal with all vehicles currently being lifted under Operation Clean Up. It is therefore proposed that the partnership will continue to run Operation Cleanup until the end of the 2008 calendar year and thereafter the Council would sign up to Operation Evader. At this time, the NIO Community Safety Unit will stand down from the Steering Group as no further funding is required for this scheme.

A schedule for Operation Evader will be established to ensure the scheme works in each of the police districts in NI on a rotational basis for one week per cycle. From initial discussions within the partnership and based on the premise that there are two police districts within Belfast, the Council would be scheduled to have NCP clamping and removing cars for two weeks in every eight week cycle.

NCP have three compounds in NI which negates the need for the Operation Cleanup compound at Duncrue. Upon cessation of Operation Cleanup at the end of the calendar year, this would permit the Council to consider other options for the site.

The partnership remains committed to overseeing the new clamping and removal scheme and is eager to maintain regular contact with the Council on the new scheme. The organisations within the partnership have asked the Council's Waste Management Service to continue to chair it on a regular basis.

Resource Implications

There are no financial resource implications for the Council. The vehicles will be lifted by DVA under their national contract at no charge to the Council or PSNI.

A Steering Group, made up of representatives from each of the partnership organisations, will continue to meet but it will be reduced to a six monthly basis. The Council has been asked to continue to chair this group.

The vehicle compound at Duncrue will no longer be required for Operation Cleanup and will therefore become available to the Council for other purposes.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to terminate Operation Cleanup on 31 December 2008 and to endorse supporting the DVA scheme (Operation Evader) from 1 January 2009.

The Committee is also asked to approve the Council's commitment to the new scheme in its role as Chair of the new partnership.

Key to Abbreviations

NIO – Northern Ireland Office.
PSNI – Police Service of Northern Ireland.
DVLNI – Driver & Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland.
PRRT – Police Retraining & Rehabilitation Trust.
DVA – Driver & Vehicle Agency.

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