

Agenda Item 9

Graffiti Removal in the public environment.

Policy amendment proposal January 2019

Background

Several years ago the Council routinely removed all graffiti in the public realm, charging only for graffiti on larger commercial premises. Where this was on privately owned property, disclaimers were routinely obtained to allow us to do this. This policy ensured that the street view remained largely graffiti free.

The revised policy was aimed at increasing revenue and reducing costs to the council. All graffiti is inspected and quotes provided to the land owner for the removal. The vast majority of owners are unwilling to pay for this service and hence the graffiti remains as an eyesore to the general public. Where the graffiti is offensive or racist then the council can take immediate action but where it is 'tagging' then this cannot be done. Income raised through this policy is minimal in comparison to the visual impact on the street.

One approach to the removal of graffiti is to issue Community Protection Warnings (CPW) followed up by a Notice (CPN). This is a role of the Community Response Team. This however penalises the land owner who is also a victim of this crime. Hence it has been used on a very few occasions as the table below indicates. It is also burdensome to administer;

Financial Year	CPW	CPN
2018 – to date	1	1
2017 - 18	0	0
2016 -17	0	0
2015 -16	4	1

Policy across the country and internationally varies widely but all research and best practice identifies that the rapid removal of graffiti has a huge impact on the activity itself. Reductions of between 60% and 80% are found when graffiti is routinely removed within 48 hours.

Proposal

We propose that the approach to graffiti removal should be changed to aim for the removal in public adopted areas within 48 hours where it is safe to do so. We should aim to charge larger commercial ventures however we should routinely remove all graffiti from private property in the public realm obtaining written consent in the process. This policy should be applied to all street furniture such as utilities boxes as well as fences and walls. For larger commercial property we will provide quotations for prompt removal by our staff and progress through the CPW/CPN process if the graffiti is not removed. This will be done in close partnership with the Community Response Team.

Due to the current policy there is a significant accumulation of graffiti which will need to be systematically removed while also responding rapidly to new reports. The reduction of this backlog will be heavily influenced by the incidence of new reports and there are currently several new and highly prolific taggers active within Oxford.

We recognise that a very small percentage of graffiti can be classed as 'street art' and in those instances we will seek further advice and direction before removing if necessary.

Common locations for graffiti are on utilities boxes and post boxes. The utility companies responsible have routine maintenance programmes of 2 to 4 years and do not clean or maintain the exterior of the boxes between planned visits and are not responsive to approaches for the removal of graffiti. We will therefore routinely remove graffiti from these sites.

Dealing with the backlog;

The accumulated backlog will be approached systematically to ensure it is done as efficiently as possible. This will involve a street-by-street approach, estate by estate to ensure whole areas are cleared. The current backlog of recorded graffiti stands at approx. 1200 instances of larger graffiti together with around 10000 small isolated tags.

The City Centre will be the first area to be tackled using this holistic approach alongside known 'hot spots' around the city. This would be followed by main arterial routes into the city such as Cowley Road, Botley Rd, London Rd etc. We will then continue ward by ward and keep members advised of progress through regular updates to:

members@oxford.gov.uk

Routinely the small insidious tags that appear regularly across the city will be dealt with where possible through the street cleaning teams who will be equipped with basic graffiti removal materials. These teams will be area based increasing the ownership of the areas to the individuals within each team. Empowering teams in this way, together with the streamlining of the administrative process previously employed to record graffiti, will release staff time. Further capacity will be created through a move away from the limited revenue generating activities that the team engaged in.

It is therefore estimated that the overall budget pressure on the Streetscene service, without allowing for any increased tagging activity will be no more than £10k per annum. It is planned to absorb this cost pressure through efficiencies within the service.

Bruce Thompson
City Centre and Street Scene Service Manager
Oxford Direct Services
Bruce.Thompson@oxfordds.co.uk

This page is intentionally left blank