

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 7 December 2006
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Health & Community
SUBJECT: Alley gates
WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To consider the scheme for installing alley gates across the Borough, and the financial implications of maintaining them.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION:

That the Executive Board endorse the approach to the:

- i) management of alley gates as set out in Paragraph 4.0 below;**
- ii) financial management of alley gates as set out in Paragraphs 5.3 and 5.4 below.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The gating of rear entries or alleys known as “Alley gating” has proved to be a very successful crime prevention measure, contributing to reducing burglaries, criminal damage, graffiti and vandalism. It has also reduced incidents of anti-social behaviour and fly tipping.

3.2 The scheme simply involves erecting a gate to block off the narrow back alleys at the rear of people’s dwellings. Each householder has a key to the gate and access for refuse collection and emergency services is guaranteed.

3.3 Halton ran a pilot scheme for alley gating of 13 gates in 2001. Its success led to many requests for alley gates across the Borough. By 2003 over 100 gates had been installed. A formal review was carried out in 2003 by Mott MacDonald on behalf of the Borough Council on the perceptions of those residents that had alley gates installed.

This showed that: -

- 95% agreed with the use of alley gating, feeling that the

- introduction of gates had made them feel safer in their homes.
- 75% felt that anti-social behaviour had reduced.
- 68% felt that burglary had reduced.
- 57% felt that violent crime had reduced.
- 79% felt that vandalism had decreased.
- 77% felt that fly tipping had reduced.
- 83% felt that youth annoyance had declined.

3.4 The evidence suggests that alley gates have been highly successful. Police statistics show reduced levels of rear-entry burglaries. Currently approximately 300 gates have been erected. Whilst opportunities still exist to extend the scheme it is felt that many premises that are suitable to be alley gated have been.

4.0 **GENERAL ISSUES AND PROPOSED NEW OPERATIONAL PRACTICES**

4.1 From what started as a pilot scheme alley gates have become a major project. There is a need to review the managerial and financial arrangements for alley gates to put in place systems that ensure they are sustainable. The following operational processes are therefore proposed.

4.2 All new requests for gates should be directed to the Community Safety Team who have the strategic overview for alley gates and who will carry out risk assessments to determine if new gates are appropriate. This involves full consideration of planning issues and local consultation, in conjunction with Area Forums and ensuring that financial packages are in place to fit and maintain the gates.

4.3 It should be noted that although all previously erected gates went through the formal process of acquiring planning permission, these permissions were invariably given in the knowledge that the works could not be countenanced by the Highway Authority, as highway legislation could not permit the gating of the highway. The Clean Neighbourhood Act and the insertion of Section 8A into the Highways Act changes this position. The criteria and tests now to be applied are explained in the attached document (Appendix 1).

4.4 If new gates are to be fitted the Community Safety Team will commission the Council's Property Services Department to install them. Property Services will also monitor the maintenance of the gates and undertake any repairs.

4.5 Any other on-going issues (e.g. lost keys; each key costs £5) should be directed to the Community Safety Team, who will be the interface with the public at all times, and who will commission Property Services if work is required.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Initially alley gates were funded through the Council's Community Safety Project Budget and Government Office North-West grants. This included installation and maintenance. The total project budget for Halton Borough Council is £15,000 but this is also used to support all community safety initiatives. This budget is not enough to support the current network of gates. It also needs to be directed to other community safety initiatives. The rapid increase of gates has latterly been funded through Area Forums, but this has not included any maintenance monies.
- 5.2 It is proposed that funding for new gates continue to be funded by Area Forums through Property Services. Capital costs for new gates range from £625 to £873, including fees, depending on the size of the alley to be gated. Planning fees are £135 per application. The cost per gate is dependent on the number of gates per application.
- 5.3 All the gates currently installed have never had a maintenance budget. In the early days this was subsumed by Community Safety's Project budget. Now, however, given the number of gates and their age maintenance has become a major unbudgeted issue. Property Services estimate the maintenance cost of a gate over a 5 year period to be £565 (including fees). There are at least 300 gates in Halton. The total cost, therefore, is £169,500 over a 5 year period. Averaged out the annual cost is £34,000. There is currently no budget to meet such costs.
- 5.4 It is proposed that: -
- a) Any new gate installed should include the 5 year maintenance cost in the financial package. In other words, if an Area Forum agreed to fund installation they should also take on the maintenance responsibility.
 - b) For the maintenance of current gates a growth bid for £34,000 will be submitted as part of the 2007/08 budget to cover maintenance costs process. If this is not successful however Area Forums would have to take funding responsibility for maintenance. Area Forums should be asked to agree a commuted sum to cover repair/maintenance for a 5 year period. If there is no Area Forum money or the Area Forum decline to fund repair and maintenance the gates would have to be removed if they fell into disrepair or become a health and safety risk.
 - c) Officers continue to seek alternatives to reduce projected maintenance costs. The Pride of Place Team could undertake some basic maintenance, if trained. Similarly those under Community Service Orders might undertake basic maintenance.

Further work would need to be done to test the feasibility of such options.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

6.1 Evidence suggests that the gates are successful in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. To remove them, or allow them to fall into a state of disrepair could affect crime statistics, Government Floor targets and LAA agreements.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 None associated with the project. Local consultation is always carried out before gates are fitted.

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer