Deprived neighbourhoods can be demoralising places to live. Not only do many residents face poor living conditions and difficult personal circumstances, but they may fear becoming victim to crime or anti-social behaviour, both of which are higher than average in these areas. Local streets and open spaces, scarred with graffiti, litter and abandoned cars, can only underline this bleak outlook.

Neighbourhood wardens are taking responsibility for many of these problems – problems which in the past didn’t directly ‘belong’ to anyone. They are working to make the streets safer, cleaner places to be and helping to build a greater sense of community and better quality of life for residents.
Key issues

1. The Government has far reaching plans for revitalising deprived neighbourhoods, set out in its strategy A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal. These plans include reducing crime and improving the environment, using neighbourhood wardens to complement existing services.

2. £65 million of Government funding is supporting 245 new or existing neighbourhood warden schemes between 2000-2005, many in renewal areas.

3. Crime rates have risen over the past 20 years and many social problems have become acute, particularly in deprived areas where the ‘self regulation’ of the community can break down. In the country’s 88 poorest neighbourhoods there are more households with incomes of less than half the national average as well as more teenage pregnancy, youth underachievement, truancy and school exclusions, underemployment, drug misuse and ill health.

4. Wardens provide a visible, semi-official presence on streets and estates. They work at the grassroots with police and others to improve liveability, deter crime and tackle anti-social behaviour, creating a greater feeling of security and confidence among residents. This sort of informal observation has often been lacking in recent years, as locally based services - such as housing caretakers, and area-based social and community workers - have withdrawn.

5. Wardens are specially trained and are uniformed, providing an easily recognised point of contact for residents – someone to report incidents to or to discuss community issues with. They are not a replacement for the police - rather they complement their work and that of Police Community Support Officers.

6. A Neighbourhood Wardens Team has been set up as part of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit. It manages, promotes and evaluates neighbourhood warden schemes.

“Wardens provide a visible, semi-official presence on streets and estates. They work at the grassroots with police and others to deter crime and tackle anti-social behaviour creating a greater feeling of security and confidence amongst residents.”
Crime and its consequences

The effect of crime on people living in deprived areas is often made worse by their poverty and relative inability to protect themselves – and this is particularly true of vulnerable groups of people. The fear of crime effectively imprisons some people in their own homes. Crime affects the economy too. Across the country, crime costs an estimated £50 billion a year and in deprived areas, which are particularly badly hit, it can discourage businesses and other initiatives from starting up. Forty per cent of crime takes place in just ten per cent of areas.

- Ten per cent of inner city residents are burgled once or more in a year – double the rate elsewhere.
- Half the people who are victims of crime are repeat victims, accounting for over 80 per cent of recorded crime.
- A quarter of black and minority ethnic residents in low income multi-ethnic areas say racially motivated attacks are a fairly or very big problem for them.

What does a neighbourhood warden do?

Neighbourhood problems often stem from a mix of factors and warden schemes must adapt to local needs. For example, there may be high crime rates linked to poor housing design, poor quality local environment and general apathy.

Warden duties can include:
- security patrols;
- environmental improvements;
- tenant liaison and information and community development;
- looking after empty properties;
- an information source for the police or local authority and professional witness service;
- visits to vulnerable tenants, victims of crime or intimidated witnesses;
- responding to minor incidents of anti-social behaviour and low level neighbourhood disputes; and
- looking after community services.

Solutions could involve better housing, cleaning up litter and graffiti, better surveillance and promoting a stronger community spirit.

Communities take part in deciding what sort of warden service they need. For example, wardens can promote community safety, help with environmental improvements and housing management and contribute to community development. They may patrol the local area, provide concierge duties or act as ‘supercaretakers’ on estates. One of the hallmarks of successful warden schemes is high-quality training.

Partners in renewal

The Government's strategy recommends that communities should be closely involved in planning warden schemes. This is particularly important for vulnerable groups of people, who are most at risk from crime or anti-social behaviour or who suffer most from fear of crime.

Vulnerable groups include elderly and disabled people and people from black and ethnic minorities, particularly as 70 per cent of all English ethnic minorities live in the 88 most deprived neighbourhoods. Some of the most successful warden schemes employ people from these groups, helping to build more confidence within the community. Warden schemes are built on strong partnerships with the police and with other services, particularly social housing providers and social services.

Many schemes are run by local authorities, and increasingly by housing associations. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has welcomed the initiative, and drawn up principles for working with wardens.

Warden schemes have played a part in a number of programmes – for example, in the New Deal for Communities initiative, which targets the 39 most disadvantaged parts of the country. They are important to Crime and Disorder Partnerships, working with police, local authorities and local people to tackle specific local crime problems. They can also form part of Neighbourhood Management. They are also central to many community safety strategies.

Spreading success

Warden schemes have been generally well received by residents, police and other agencies. Apart from boosting the wellbeing and confidence of residents in disadvantaged areas, there is hard evidence of their success in terms of reduced crime, fewer empty properties and improved local services.

For example, following the introduction of Hartlepool’s supercaretakers scheme, recorded crime fell by 35 per cent over three years. In Middlesborough, wardens have almost totally eliminated graffiti in their area. Sheffield wardens’ fast track response to abandoned cars has reduced removal time from 30 to 10 days. The lessons learnt from these and many other successes are being promoted across the country.
“Wardens can help with environmental improvements and housing management, contribute to community development and promote community safety.”

“Wardens have a special place in my heart as a minister. I am simply in awe of all that you do. Every time I go around to see wardens, or take part in street walks with wardens – which I’ve done throughout the country – the changes that wardens make, the ideas and innovation they bring, different in each place, but all making a real impact, is really awesome to see.”

Tony McNulty, Regeneration Minister.