

thisislondon.co.uk

the entertainment guide

NOW IT'S THE CITIZEN SNOOPERS: COUNCILS RECRUIT UNPAID VOLUNTEERS TO SPY ON THEIR NEIGHBOURS

Last updated at 02:44am on 30.08.08

[Add your view](#)

Councils are recruiting 'citizen snoopers' to report litter louts, dog foulers and even people who fail to sort out their rubbish properly.

The 'environment volunteers' will also be responsible for encouraging neighbours to cut down on waste.

The move comes as local authorities dish out £100 fines to householders who leave out too much rubbish or fail to follow recycling rules.



Spy on your neighbours: Councils are recruiting spotters to report litter louts, dog foulers and bad recyclers

It will fuel fears that Britain is lurching towards a Big Brother society, following the revelation this week that the Home Office is extending some police powers to council staff and private security guards.

Critics said the latest scheme could easily be abused and encourage a culture of bin spies and curtain twitchers.

Matthew Elliott, of the Taxpayers' Alliance, said: 'Snooping on your neighbours to report recycling infringements sounds like something straight out of the East German Stasi's

copybook.

'With council tax so high, the last thing people want to pay for is an army of busybodies peering through their net curtains at their neighbours as they put out their rubbish.'

Recruitment adverts appealing for the unpaid environmental volunteers have appeared across the country in recent months.

In Hampshire, Eastleigh council wants locals to 'monitor local environmental quality' and report 'issues' involving recycling and waste. In East London, Tower Hamlets is recruiting volunteers for a crackdown on reluctant recyclers. Other councils are expected to launch similar schemes.

Officially, the volunteers are not encouraged to spy on neighbours or report them. But councils are unlikely to ignore tip-offs.

Earlier this year the Daily Mail revealed that councils have hired 850 agents and informers to catch fly-tippers, tax cheats and other offenders.

The 'covert human intelligence sources' keep watch on suspected law-breakers and jobs. Any evidence they find, such as illegal alcohol sales or wastedumping, can be used in court.

The latest recruits are being hired by council environment departments.

Eastleigh has already taken on around a dozen who answered an advert in a council newsletter which said: 'Volunteers will be involved in reporting issues in their area such as recycling, waste, fly-tipping, graffiti, dog fouling and abandoned vehicles'.

The recruits will also be involved in the 'promotion of recycling and waste minimisation across the borough'.

The LibDem-controlled council denied the volunteers would be asked to spy on neighbours.

'These are all people who care about the environment and they will be ambassadors for their area,' a spokesman said. 'They will be there to report graffiti, abandoned vehicles and local vandalism, but not to report on other individuals.'

The volunteers will be trained on the council's waste and recycling policies and asked to explain them in the community.

'They might go to an over-60s club and talk about recycling,' said the spokesman.



But Labour councillor Brian Norgate said: 'I wouldn't be overkeen on asking volunteers to be snooping, if that's what this turned out to be. We have people trained in doing this.'

Tower Hamlets calls its volunteers 'environment champions'. According to the council they report on 'a number of environmental crimes, issues and concerns, such as graffiti, dumped rubbish and abandoned cars.'

A spokesman said: 'They demonstrate environmentally-friendly behaviour, encourage other residents to recycle and are pro-active in the neighbourhood.'

The Local Government Association said: 'Environment volunteers care passionately about their area and want to protect it. They are not snoopers. They will help councils cut crime and make places cleaner, greener and safer.'

The news follows a trend of recruiting ordinary people to help catch those responsible for minor crimes. On Wednesday, it emerged more than 1,400 people will have police powers under the Home Office's Community Safety Accreditation Scheme.

Security guards, park wardens and other local authority staff can issue fines for a large number of offences, stop cars and seize alcohol from underage drinkers.

READER VIEWS (13)

[Add your view](#) | [Show all](#)

Here's a sample of the latest views published. You can click [view all](#) to read all views that readers have sent in.

Why do the media still use that oft-repeated line that Britain is "sleepwalking towards, or "lurching towards" a surveillance society straight out of Orwell's 1984.

You're already there, Britain. You're already there.

You might as well have kept the planes on the ground back in 1940, because the effort was obviously wasted.

- Ian Roberts, Hamilton, Ontario

Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never-in nothing, great or small, large or petty - never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.

In today's case, the enemy is looking at us in the mirror each day. Security and order will always seem attractive in the short run. However, remember the price paid will be that of freedom. A price people always regret paying down the road.

- Chino Churn Twills, Hyde Park, London, UK

Could the last person to leave please switch off the lights?

- Pete, Telfordski, United (ha!) Kingdom

ADD YOUR COMMENT

[Show all](#)

Name:

Email: Your email address will not be published

Town and country:

Your comment:

[Terms and conditions](#)

You have 1500 characters left.

[make text area bigger](#)

- Remember me - this will save your name, location and email address for when you leave your next comment.
- Email me a link to these comments.



[DAILY MAIL](#)
[MAIL ON SUNDAY](#)
[TRAVEL MAIL](#)
[THIS IS MONEY](#)

[METRO](#)

Part of the Daily Mail, The Mail on Sunday, Evening Standard & Metro Media Group

© 2008 Associated Newspapers Limited [Terms](#) [Privacy policy](#) [Advertise with us](#) [Advertise in London Lite](#)