

Offenders' help to be extended

Council to make more use of probation service

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CONVICTED criminals could be working to support your community through the payback scheme.

Cllr Ann Coe, a verger at South Weald parish church, has revealed she has been working with the probation service to improve the church grounds for the past nine years, and described their contribution as "invaluable".

Last Saturday a team of six offenders tidied up the church yard, having been sentenced to community work as punishment for their crimes.

Ann Coe said: "One of the workers came up to me to say how good he felt about the work he did."

She added: "The people who come are low risk boys and girls.

"At festival time the girls were cleaning the church and they were so thrilled and proud about the work they were doing they started calling it their church."

Usually offenders are supervised by probation but Ann is hoping in the near future she will be able to act as a supervisor for single workers.

Graffiti

Now Brentwood council, which started using the service last October, says it wants to extend its involvement too.

Areas which could be tackled as a result include graffiti-covered garages in Hutton and sheltered housing units in The Gables, Essex Way.

Cllr Mark Reed said at an environment panel meeting last week, that work carried out in King Georges playing fields by the offenders had actually been to a high-

er standard than that carried out by the council's own contractors.

He also said he was interested in using the service to benefit Brentwood Theatre where he works.

Roger Keeble, chairman of Blackmore Parish Council, said he would be using the scheme: "There are lots of ditches surrounding sports fields which get filthy," he said.

"We certainly will go ahead and use them."

Cllr Michael Golding, who saw first hand on a visit to Basildon probation service, the work that is done, said: "The visit really opened my eyes to see what these people do in the community.

"They are not chain gangs in pyjamas. They are people who did small crimes who are putting back into the community."

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