

Urbecon Ltd

KEEPING WATCH

Report to the Home Office, Crime Strategy and
Resources Unit, on the Neighbourhood Watch
Development Project

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Opinions expressed in this Report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Home Office.

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Neighbourhood Watch Development Project

Report to the Home Office, Crime Reduction Delivery Team:

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1. Introduction and Executive Summary

This Report describes a study of Neighbourhood Watch carried out by the Urbecon Crime and Community Safety Unit in early 2004 for the Home Office, Crime Strategy and Resources Unit.

The object was to consider the current activity and potential future development of Neighbourhood Watch and what might be needed to bring about improved effective working. In particular the key issues to be addressed by the recommendations were

- What do the police need to do to bring about effective engagement and co-operation with Neighbourhood Watch to encourage active citizenship?
- What does Neighbourhood Watch need to do to help itself ensure effective co-operation with the police?
- What role does the NNWA have in the development of Neighbourhood Watch?
- What should central government do to help Neighbourhood Watch to become a more effective partner and encourage the police to engage more effectively with such organisations?

The report outlines the methodology for the study, (in Chapter 3) which involved postal surveys of police services and of crime and disorder reduction partnerships and a series of interviews with both volunteers and officials at local level engaged in the management and promotion of neighbourhood Watch schemes and with crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour in thirty-six neighbourhoods.

The findings from these investigations and from examination of a wide range of documentation, led to the conclusions summarised in Chapter 5. From these, a series of recommendations for action at national and local level was developed (Chapter 6). The primary recommendation is for the establishment of a new National Forum to bring together those organisations which represent, nationally, the different public and voluntary bodies which are concerned with the related issues of crime and disorder, anti-social behaviour and environmental degradation at the neighbourhood level. It is proposed that the Forum should provide a facility for the exchange of information and experience and a publicly accessible library of good practices.

Further recommendations call for the National Neighbourhood Watch Association to commission an independent a review of its activities and structure as a prelude to assumption of a more focused role and for the development of clear policy statements by police services so that those who seek to initiate local schemes will know what level of support they can expect.

2. Background to the project

Urbecon was appointed in February 2004 by the Home Office Crime Strategy and Resources Unit to carry out a study of Neighbourhood Watch organisation in Britain. The assignment was defined as

- (i) To carry out a survey of effective working between the police and Neighbourhood Watch and other, similar local schemes, identifying models of good practice and an analysis of the reasons for their effectiveness and of the barriers to achieving more effective working;
- (ii) On the basis of this analysis, to make recommendations on what needs to be done by
 - The Police
 - Neighbourhood Watch at all levels
 - The National Neighbourhood Watch Association
 - The centre

to ensure wider implementation of good practice and an indication of the costs involved.

2.1 Project Objectives

The primary objectives of the study have been to learn more about the ways in which Neighbourhood Watches and similar groups are organised and operated and the reasons for their success or failure, to identify alternative forms of social engagement in the responses to crime in places where Neighbourhood Watch is weak or absent and to develop, from an analysis of the data collected, a set of proposals for action. The key issues to be addressed by the recommendations were

- What do the police need to do to bring about effective engagement and co-operation with Neighbourhood Watch to encourage active citizenship
- What does Neighbourhood Watch need to do at all levels to ensure effective support and co-operation with the police
- What does the NNWA need to do to ensure effective support for Neighbourhood Watch
- What should central government do to help Neighbourhood Watch to become a more effective partner and encourage the police to engage more effectively with such organisations.

2.2 Neighbourhood Watch in the UK

Neighbourhood Watch started in the UK in 1982 in Cheshire. The scheme was based upon apparently successful examples in the USA. The basic concept was to bring neighbours together to observe criminal activity in their neighbourhood and to liaise with local police services, providing specific witness data and general criminal intelligence, while at the same time, acting as a conduit for the dissemination of information by the police to local communities about particular risks and events.

The system grew very rapidly in the 1980's— sometimes using different names such as 'Homewatch' and 'Community Watch'. The model was adapted to specific needs such as 'Pubwatch' and 'Horsewatch'. By 2000, the number of 'Watches' in the country had, apparently, grown to some 155,000¹, covering perhaps six million households and more than ten million people. In 1995, the National Neighbourhood Watch Association was formed to 'promote, support and represent' Neighbourhood Watches and to provide a range of central services.

Neighbourhood Watch is intended to bring neighbours together and concentrate interest in local crime and disorder problems in 'neighbourhoods' which may be of varying size from a single street to a village or similar urban area. In essence, the scheme is based upon communications. It may be defined as having three distinguishing factors

- Use of signage – on street furniture and on individual residences – to deter criminals
- The dissemination of crime prevention information and advice by the police, which may be general (such as advice on security measures) or specific (advising people to be on guard in respect of particular crimes or criminals operating in the area)
- Intelligence and local background information passed to the police by the Watch

Neighbourhood Watch encourages active citizenship through participation in watch activities and the encouragement of individual and group participation in the social and criminal justice systems by such means as reporting and communication and accepting such obligations as giving witness evidence or background information about crime and disorder to the police and other authorities.

Watches are fundamentally 'community-led' in that local people come together to form a watch organisation and to appoint or elect a volunteer co-ordinator who will maintain contacts on behalf of members with the police, acting as a conduit for information in both directions. Typically, members contribute modest funds or engage in fundraising, especially through social events, to fund literature and signage and general running expenses.

¹ NNWA estimate

The main policy of the Neighbourhood Watch has been one of vigilance without vigilantism. Members are encouraged to pass information to the police, directly or through co-ordinators rather than to attempt to deal with problems themselves, though it is noted that some Watches appear to have undertaken local patrols².

After 2000, there is some evidence that the number of watches declined. This may be because crime levels had fallen and thus so had the enthusiasm of some local activists. To some extent, the public agenda appeared to have moved on and 'active citizens' of the kind essential to Neighbourhood Watch, had begun to identify different issues such as anti-social behaviour and environmental degradation (e.g. litter, failure to maintain the built environment) as of greater significance. But some Watches began to broaden the scope of their activities to comprehend such issues and to address other problems, such as the isolation of elderly or vulnerable people. During the past year there seems to have been a resurgence and a majority of the respondents to surveys carried out as a part of the current study have reported growth at the present time.

² Found via a search of individual NW websites

2.3 The wider context

Change in the Neighbourhood Watch 'movement' must be seen in the context of changing government and police policies towards community engagement in the fight against crime. During the past decade, government has been increasingly concerned with neighbourhood issues: in the late 1990's, much of the work of the Social Exclusion Unit was concerned with neighbourhood deprivation and the government response was to create the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund) and the 'New Deal for Communities' (NDC) directed at the problems of the most deprived neighbourhoods.

The crime and disorder agenda has changed in tandem with this. The Crime and Disorder Act of 1998 placed a responsibility on police and local authorities to work in partnership to address problems of crime and disorder at the local level. As concern grew about anti-social behaviour rather than crime as such, housing authorities and social landlords led the way in deploying civil action against those whose activities disrupted the tranquillity of their neighbours' lives. The Anti-Social Behaviour Act of 2003 strengthened the role of local partnerships in addressing such issues.

Thus Neighbourhood Watch works within a wider context of initiatives and actions at the neighbourhood level, including

The use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders

The 'Safer Neighbourhoods' initiative

Target hardening and 'secure by design'

Mobile police stations

The spread of CCTV

Deployment of Neighbourhood Wardens and Community Police Support Officers

Targeted Policing Initiatives

The establishment of Community Police Consultative Groups

The growth of the 'Crimestoppers' system

Establishment of the Government's Anti-Social Behaviour Unit

The government's 'Green paper' of November 2003 'Policing – Building Safer Communities Together' - drew specific attention to Neighbourhood Watch as one of the ways of engaging members of the community in responses to crime and disorder. This was an echo of the guidance to CRDPs issued by the Home Office at the start of 1999, in which local strategic partners had been urged to give support to Neighbourhood Watch.

These changes and policy statements must be seen against the changing role of the police over more the past two decades. Traditionally, chief officers of police were jealous of their operational autonomy, which gave them freedom from political interference at the local level. But concerns about the operational behaviour of police officers, along with allegations of miscarriages of justice, encouraged reconsideration of this. At the same time, police officers recognised, to a greater extent than in previous decades, that public support and consent was required for them to be effective. During the past ten years, the police have become increasingly open to community participation in their decision-making and to the concept of accountability

to the public for their actions. In some cases, it would be fair to say that the police have led the progressive agenda towards more community engagement. The new environment was, perhaps, best described in the green paper, in which it was said

‘We believe that the often-used term ‘operational independence’ is in fact a stumbling block in talking about the accountability of the police service. Instead we should begin focusing on the *operational responsibility* of chief officers – because to say ‘independence’ suggests a lack of accountability.’

There is a wealth of evidence that police services have embraced this new agenda and have sought to share ownership of the issues with partners in local authorities and with the voluntary sector to an increasing extent.

At the same time, it has become more widely accepted that crime itself is only part of the problem in many neighbourhoods. Often, anti-social behaviour is of far greater concern to residents, particularly to the vulnerable members of the community. And, as the Home Secretary has pointed out, while crime has fallen in recent years, *fear of crime* has increased and there is a consequent need to reinforce the fight against crime with actions which can tackle anti-social behaviour and provide reassurance to those who live with fear.

It is within this setting that there has been a growing movement toward public participation in policing, of which expansion of Neighbourhood Watch, with increasing police support is an example. But the many changes in the overall environment also present an opportunity and a need to re-examine the role of Neighbourhood Watch and its future development in the changing context of community engagement in tackling crime and disorder at the neighbourhood level.

3. Methodology

The primary requirement of the study was to gain as much information as possible about the current state of Neighbourhood Watch throughout the country, and about relations between the 'Watches' and the relevant public authorities – especially the police services – as quickly as possible. The timescale and the absence of a comprehensive database of local Watches made a detailed survey of Neighbourhood Watches themselves impractical. It was therefore decided to carry out postal surveys of the main public agencies concerned, followed by a series of semi-structured interviews with key actors in a wide range of locations and the examination of documentary evidence.

3.1 Postal Surveys

Two postal surveys were conducted. All police services and all of the Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) set up in accordance with the 1988 Crime and Disorder Act were surveyed.

Of the 43 police services in England and Wales, replies were received from a total of 34 (79%). Of the 376 CDRPs, some 138 (38%) replied within the specified time limit and were subject to detailed quantitative and thematic analyses. (Three further responses were received at a later date and the views expressed therein were taken into account in the final analysis and the consideration of the results)

3.2 Interviews and case studies

Thirty local neighbourhoods were selected for closer examination. Care was taken to ensure that the selection included a broad spectrum of areas in terms of their demographic and socio-economic profiles. A selection was made, firstly, from the respondents to the surveys. This selection was structured on the basis of Harper et al's 14 BCU families and the 10 standard Regions. The final sample selection represents each BCU family (excluding family 14: airports) and all standard regions. Within each BCU area, an attempt was made to identify two neighbourhoods, one in which NW was said to be strong and another in which it was advised to be weak or absent.

Visits were made and interviews were carried out with local Neighbourhood Watch volunteer co-ordinators, police officers and staff of local authorities engaged in Neighbourhood Watch activity or liaison. In the areas in which NWs were weak or absent, attempts were made to identify and interview other community representatives, such as officers of tenants and residents associations, in place of volunteer NW co-ordinators, so as to investigate what alternative systems were in place. This proved to be problematic as the local contacts were rarely able to identify organisations within the community which fulfilled similar roles. Steps were taken to identify additional neighbourhoods in which NW was absent and to interview community representatives.

In total, 129 interviews were conducted, with 136 respondents, across 36 neighbourhoods. All standard regions and all BCU families were represented.

The distributions by BCU family are shown below.

BCU Family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
N° of Interviews	8	23	4	19	7	8	11	8	12	7	9	12	8

In addition, interviews were conducted with various Home Office staff, ACPO representatives and with the National Neighbourhood Watch Association. In several cases, follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with respondents to the surveys.

Interviews		
NW Volunteers		38
Police Service representatives		36
CDRP representatives		25
Dedicated (paid) NW staff	Community Watch Liaison Officers	7
	Area co-ordinators	5
	NW administrators	3
	NW Development Officer	1
	NW project officer	1
	NW Manager	1
Representatives of communities without NW		12
TOTAL		129

3.3 Literature and background material

A great deal of literature about local Watches and the policies of local authorities and police services was gathered from survey respondents and from those who were interviewed in the 36 neighbourhoods. In addition, a web search was conducted and the websites of many local authorities and police services were examined, as were the individual websites of a number of Neighbourhood Watches and NW Associations around the country. Further information was gained from official publications and academic research papers, both in the UK and abroad.

The web search produced 394,000 hits worldwide and 104,000 in the UK. Many sites are for local Neighbourhood Watch schemes offering information as to the structure of such schemes, how to get involved and the activities carried out. Other websites identified by this search included NNWA, the Neighbourhood Watch Forum, BBC crime prevention, and the UK Home insurance directory (which indicates the potential for NW members to secure lower rates of home insurance on the basis of their membership.)

The NNWA website provides information ranging from setting up a NW scheme to interesting press releases identifying good practice and outstanding contributions from particular schemes and individuals. (For example, Hull NW scheme and a local young person in Suffolk have been honoured in the National Crime Prevention Awards.)

Further searches were conducted via the Research Development & Statistics Division of the Home Office and the Web of Science providing ten articles which discuss and explore the effectiveness of NW and the nature/structure of schemes.

Interview reports and survey responses were subject to quantitative and thematic analyses. The inferences drawn from these and from the thematic analyses and background material are set out in Chapter 4, below.

4. Findings

4.1 The size and extent of Neighbourhood Watch

In 2000 the NNWA estimated that, at that time, the total number of Neighbourhood Watches in England and Wales was about 155,000. The British Crime Survey estimated that these covered six million households.

Evidence from the current study suggests that the present-day figures may be slightly lower: precise figures are not available as there is no central register and many of the police services are only able to offer estimates. The estimates are subject to change as it is difficult to take an entirely objective view about the existence of some watches: a lack of activity may mean that the Watch has completely disbanded and ceased to exist or it may be simply dormant owing to a lack of local issues of concern.

While the total number of Watches may now be slightly lower than was estimated in 2000/2001³, there are widespread reports of growth. Of the police services responding to the postal survey, 21 (of 34) reported that NW was growing at the present time and only one reported a decline. Of 138 responses from CDRPs, 87 reported current growth and only eight believed the number was now falling. Interview data have helped to suggest some of the reasons for these apparently different impressions:

- It appears likely that there was, in fact, a decline in the total following 2000 but that, overall, the decline has been halted and is now being reversed: the main cause of this is increased efforts by police and CDRPs to encourage the formation of new Watches and the deployment of paid staff to facilitate formation;
- There are apparent regional differences: notably, there has been a reduction in numbers in the north eastern region but rapid recent growth in London and the south east⁴;
- There is a degree of 'churn' with some watches ceasing to operate while new ones are being formed;
- In some cases, new Watches are noted while older ones do not entirely disappear, giving the impression of overall growth in areas where the number is, in fact, static. In other cases, there has been some 'pruning' of local lists which have given a misleading impression of *recent* decline

The absence of any effective central system of registration means that quantifying the numbers of watches and of participants is likely to remain difficult for some time to come. However, from the point of view of individual Watches, there appears to be no demand – and little purpose – for a centralised scheme. Most watches and associations appear to look to their local police and CDRP for the contact they require with

³ Based on survey responses from police services, February 2004

⁴ Based on police survey responses and information from local partnerships

government. Any system of registration or accreditation would be best managed at these levels, with police HQ staff noting the numbers for statistical purposes.

4.2 Geographical spread

Neighbourhood Watch is genuinely a 'nationwide' activity. Evidence of active, functioning groups was found in every standard region and in all of the police service areas from which survey responses were received as the table below demonstrates.

Home Office Regions	N° of CDRP Responses	N° of Police Responses	Total
East of England	17	5	22
East Midlands	13	3	16
London	7	2	9
North East	12	3	15
North West	19	4	23
South East	26	4	30
South West	15	5	20
West Midlands	8	3	11
Yorkshire & The Humber	13	1	14
Wales	8	4	12
Total	138	34	172

At the outset, it appeared from previous research that NW was biased towards more affluent and comparatively low crime areas. This is probably still the case but there are signs that this is changing and that more NW organisations are beginning to appear in higher crime areas and in less affluent neighbourhoods.

The apparent change is an effect of a shift in attitude and policy on the part of both police services and local partnerships, many of which have striven to encourage NW activity in areas that appear to need it, perhaps giving less attention to those areas in which NW is already well-established and actively seeking to promote NW in less affluent areas and among 'hard to reach' sections of the community. Interviews with police/CDRP staff suggest that there is a widespread recognition that the traditional base is in middle class areas, that this may have distorted the disposition of police resources and that positive action can be taken to overcome this problem.

4.3 Levels and types of activity

It is clear that Neighbourhood Watch is not a coherent and homogenous set of organisations but in terms of its organisation and impact, varies considerably from place to place. Different organisations which carry the 'Neighbourhood Watch' banner have varying opinions about what it means and what it should do. Even the name is not universally adopted, some organisations being known as 'Homewatch' or 'Community Watch'. There are also some specialist 'watches' such as 'Pubwatch' and 'Horsewatch'. Local groups range from the extremely informal, to well-organised and formally structured NGOs at the association level.

Levels of 'activity' vary considerably. Survey evidence shows that among CDRP respondents, the median estimate of the proportion of NWs that were active was 70%. (the mean was 67%). Among police respondents there were broadly similar estimates. However, interview data throw some interesting light on what 'activity' might mean. One local volunteer co-ordinator summed up the situation thus:

'We do nothing at present because there really is no need. So we might be considered to be inactive. But I have everyone's name and telephone number and I keep in touch with the police from time to time. If we have a problem, I can quickly alert people, or call a meeting if need be.'

Many local officials (CDRP or police staff) charged with liaison or promotion took a similarly practical view: they did not, in most cases, promote activity for the sake of it but only as a response to perceived needs. In some cases, this was said to be because it was recognised that dealing with NWs took up time and sometimes risked diverting attention and resource to areas that had little need for it. Rather than encourage unnecessary activity, a wiser policy was to concentrate efforts on those areas that had problems which a Neighbourhood Watch could help to address.

While the activities of Watches varied, some had adopted novel schemes to help particular sections of the community. For example, in Gwynedd and later in Hull, a 'nominated neighbour scheme had been developed to help protect elderly and vulnerable people from artifice burglary.

Example: Nominated Neighbour: HANWaG

The 'Nominated Neighbour' scheme was originally devised by Gwent Police to help prevent bogus caller and doorstep crime against vulnerable residents. Residents are provided with a bright yellow Nominated Neighbour card (free of charge) that directs unknown / unexpected callers to the house of a nearby 'Nominated Neighbour' who can verify the caller's validity. Alternatively the card can provide the telephone number of a trusted friend or relation so that the caller can be checked by telephone. The 'Nominated Neighbour' accompanies the caller to the vulnerable resident's home when they are confident that the caller is genuine or telephones the resident to offer further advice.

The 'Nominated Neighbour' card is never left on permanent display: it is shown to the unexpected caller through a window or through a chain secured front door.

In other cases, it was apparent that NWs had broadened the scope of their activities beyond the original approach to crime and disorder. A number of interviewees indicated that they were as much concerned with anti-social behaviour as with crime and a few referred to environmental problems in their neighbourhoods. None, however, made reference to involvement in the government's recently launched 'Together' campaign against anti-social behaviour.

Others had embraced a wider social agenda. The need to encourage 'neighbourliness' in a general sense, particularly towards the elderly and vulnerable, was widely

appreciated and one NW Association had pioneered the 'Data Link' system to provide essential medical information to emergency services.

Example – DATA LINK

Data Link – promoted as 'The Life-saving message in a bottle' was developed by the Humberside NW Association (HANWAG) for people who require constant medication. Sponsored by Boots plc and Smith & Nephew, the scheme provides a prominently marked plastic bottle in which regular or repeat drug prescriptions can be kept.

Recipients are asked to place the bottle in their refrigerators and provided with a fridge magnet to place on the door to indicate that the bottle is in place.

In the event of a fire, or the patient suffering a collapse such as a stroke or heart attack, emergency services can thus gain immediate access to information about the patient's needs and about any current drug regime which might influence care or resuscitation procedures.

There is thus some evidence that Neighbourhood Watch can, in some areas, provide a more general community-based resource which goes beyond the original exclusive concern with neighbourhood crime problems. One Watch was found to be conducting regular neighbourhood patrols to gather information about local problems. Another was initiating debate about – and facilitating organised opposition to – government plans for ID cards.⁵

The extent to which this is either possible or desirable will vary considerably between different neighbourhoods and is essentially a matter for local decision making. In areas in which Neighbourhood Watch has declined or become moribund, the reason for inactivity or for the absence of NW is often that there is a shortage of people willing or able to come forward and offer their time to act as co-ordinators. Where this is the case, it would be counter-productive to attempt to encourage the assumption of a wider role. In other cases, where there is a well-established Watch, attention could be drawn to wider social issues to make greater use of the resource which has been developed and provide a channel for more active citizenship.

Example – Kentish Town

Membership of NW schemes in Camden is disproportionately white and middle-class. However, the latest three schemes launched were based on housing estates. In Kentish Town, although the Co-ordinator and her deputy can be described as middle-class the scheme includes a large proportion of social housing. The NW scheme is an example of a particularly active group not only in terms of crime prevention and deterrence but also in terms of community engagement; they have organised several community projects producing art walls and a community garden with local young people. The scheme is in a high crime area where many of the properties are council or social landlord owned rather than owner occupied.

⁵ Search of individual NW websites

4.4 Impact and Influence – what do Neighbourhood Watches achieve?

Impressions from background data are that NW can contribute to the reduction of fear of crime thus meeting the objective of reassuring communities as well as equipping NW scheme members with some of the tools necessary to prevent crime. Schemes also play a role in improving relations within local communities and between residents and the police (Yarwood & Edwards 1999). In support of the work of Lorraine Sims (2001) the search highlighted that NW schemes are particularly active in areas where crime is low and residents can be described as affluent.

To measure the impact of Neighbourhood Watch was not an objective of this study but some interesting and potentially useful information was, nevertheless, obtained from the interviews and surveys.

In both the postal surveys and in the semi-structured interviews, respondents were asked what they saw as the primary roles of Neighbourhood Watch

From a 'prompt' list, police and CDRP respondents overwhelmingly chose 'reassurance' as the most important role (100% of police, 98% of CDRP respondents). 'Improving police/community relations' came a very close second. A clear majority of both groups believed that 'detering criminals' was also a primary role.

Opinions varied about 'intelligence gathering', which was more favoured by police respondents (88%) than among CDRP respondents (75%) while more CDRP respondents (55%) than police respondents (47%) saw a surveillance role as primary.

Interview data suggested that such local intelligence enables officers to have a better understanding of the areas they are policing and so be more likely to solve crimes. In recent decades, police officers have become less 'local': there are wider, motorised, patrols and police stations have been concentrated into large divisional headquarters; police officers often live some distance from the 'ground' they police. Many transfer to other locations after a comparatively short period of duty. It may be that the presence of a Neighbourhood Watch provides police officers with the social contact and local awareness that is needed to replace that which was reduced through these long-term changes in the way police services operate.

Few respondents were prepared to assert categorically that NW actually succeeded in reducing crime levels or could quote firm evidence to this effect, though there was a common belief that it made a contribution in this direction: as one police officer said 'How do I prove that a crime didn't occur which would have done if we hadn't been there?'

What was notable was that a high proportion of both sets of respondents reckoned that NW met their expectations to some degree. Of CDRP respondents, a majority (54%) said it 'largely' met expectations compared with 53% of police: almost all the remaining respondents considered that NW met expectations at least in part. Only eight CDRP respondents reckoned that NW failed to meet their expectations. Interviewees were asked if the objectives of Neighbourhood Watch were realistic and replied in the affirmative in almost every case.

Some respondents reckoned that the introduction of a Neighbourhood Watch scheme could encourage an increase in the level of fear of crime, but this was generally considered to be a short term effect.

4.5 Relationships with police and local partnerships

There are widely varying degrees of integration and co-operation between NWs and both the formal, governmental, structures such as CDRPs and police services and other local community organisations. In some instances, NWs or associations thereof are directly represented within CDRP structures: in others they are dealt with at arm's length. Specialist 'watches' (e.g. 'pubwatch') are more closely related to the police – indeed are more often police-inspired - and more specific in their activities – perhaps because the participants are drawn from areas which are wider than the 'neighbourhood' and are more thinly spread.

There is an observable trend towards 'professionalism' in that CDRPs and police services employ NW co-ordinators or liaison officers or administrators in most areas, part of whose function has been to encourage activity in areas of perceived need. Another function appears, in some cases, to be to maintain official liaison with active NWs without making excessive calls upon police time.

This is part of a perceptible increase in the activity of police services and local partnerships in relation to Neighbourhood Watch, with the police, in particular, taking an increasingly proactive role in the creation of new organisations. Most of the police service areas in which interviews were conducted had appointed specialist staff – in some cases, police officers, in other cases civilians, as Neighbourhood Watch Liaison Officers or Managers. In a majority of cases, these staff were paid from mainstream police funds.

Example: Avon & Somerset

Avon and Somerset Constabulary employs a fulltime Neighbourhood Watch Development Officer at HQ level and a team of supporting administrators at the local level, one in each BCU. These posts are paid for from mainstream police funds.

Local NW schemes are expected to raise their own funds to put up NW signs and they are expected to organise their installation themselves.

In some other cases, specialist staff are employed by police with multi-agency funding, contributions being made by local authority partners. The majority of such staff identified in this project have been civilians, but there are cases in which police officers are deployed. In some other cases, police officers include a responsibility for liaison with or promotion of NW amid other, community liaison or crime prevention, duties.

It is noted, in passing, that the deployment of police officers on such specialist duties is another move away from the traditional doctrine of omnicompetence and towards specialisation within the police service.

Example, Wear Valley, County Durham

The Community Safety Co-ordinator for Wear Valley is jointly funded by Wear Valley District Council and the Police. The NW Co-ordinator / administrator is funded by the County Council via Durham Constabulary. He indicated that there are 9 other positions similar to his and these are funded in the same way. These co-ordinators / administrators have been funded by the County Council since 1995.

This trend towards 'professionalisation' is apparent within the voluntary sector, including NW itself, in at least one area, where a local association has also employed fulltime, paid, staff.

It should be noted, in this context, that there is some variation of the ways in which local partnership staff are funded. In some cases, CDRP staff are in fact, police officers on secondment to the partnership, while in others, similar tasks are undertaken by the police, but using civilian staff.

In most cases, the Neighbourhood Watch is perceived by police as part of a wider framework – one of a selection of responses to neighbourhood crime problems which sits alongside such interventions as Neighbourhood wardens and Community police Support Officers, established crime prevention activities (for which NW provides a useful channel for dissemination of advice), youth diversionary schemes, target hardening and the deployment of architectural crime design advisors, public support via the media, the 'safer neighbourhoods' initiative, 'homebeat' officers and a host of other schemes. It may be, in some cases, a part of a 'package' of measures or one of a set of available items in a 'toolkit' of measures to reduce crime and fear of crime.

A number of police services had developed useful innovations, notably in areas where NW had been weak or absent and where there was concern that local hostility to the police, social disapprobation or fear of reprisals was seen to be an inhibiting factor to community engagement. Two examples are given below:

Example: Covert NW schemes in Northamptonshire

A problem identified in Northamptonshire (as in some other places) was that in some areas, residents are not comfortable contacting the police and are anxious that involvement in NW would put them at risk from repercussions from local criminals.

The Community Watch Liaison Officer for Eastern Northants has responded to this by setting up 'covert' NW schemes. The CWLO holds regular community safety meetings at the community house on an estate. During these meetings he has discussed NW and some interest was shown by residents who suggested that they would like to be involved as co-ordinators but that they didn't feel that their neighbours would feel comfortable being known to the Police. The CWLO provided these residents with all the necessary information re: setting a NW group and asked that they contact a small number of their neighbours that they considered trustworthy. Having contacted these people the co-ordinator informs the CWLO of how many members there are but does not provide their names or contact details: the only contact police have is with the co-ordinator, who attends monthly meetings accompanied by any members who wish to attend.

These schemes are 'covert' in the sense that the members are not known to the Police /CWLO and that they do not have NW stickers in their windows, but the estate itself is signposted as a NW area.

Example: Cleveland's mini-watches

In parts of the Cleveland force area, some residents have expressed interest in NW but have been concerned about being openly identifiable to the community at large, within which there is some perceived hostility to the police. The response here has been to establish a number of 'mini-watches' bringing together a small number of people who know and trust one another and providing them with the kind of information and support that would normally be offered to a Neighbourhood watch group but without the publicly identity. The object is said to be to encourage members of these groups to give mutual support and share information and intelligence between themselves and with the police.

Management of relations between NW and the police

A majority of the police services surveyed appear to deploy specialist staff – sometimes police officers but often civilians – with specific responsibility for Neighbourhood Watch. In some cases, this is part of a wider community engagement remit but in others, it is specific to Neighbourhood Watch.

In seventeen cases the management of relations with NW is based upon specific policy statements, which tend to reflect the government's own support of the NW concept. But certain police services have taken matters a step further. In Norfolk, for example, the force Crime Reduction Department has issued 'Policy and Procedural Guidance on Home Watch and Watch Schemes' (dated August 2003) which gives very clear guidance to BCU commanders and other relevant officers about the way in

which NW is to be dealt with. The Guidance gives helpful information about the legal basis for support of NW, its relation to Human Rights legislation and to other force policies: it also gives practical advice on the establishment and monitoring and maintenance of such schemes and on the handling of information. It is a demonstration of the support for NW that the Guidance confirms, unequivocally, that persons carrying out NW duties are indemnified by the Constabulary's public liability insurance arrangements.

The Norfolk Guidance is an excellent example of good practice in relation to Neighbourhood Watch and should be made more widely available so that other police services can consider adopting similar arrangements.

In Devon and Cornwall, the policy – based upon a clear policy statement - has been extended to comprehend a 'Service Level Agreement' between the constabulary and the Devon and Cornwall Neighbourhood Watch Association, which enshrines the commitments that the two sides have made to one another.

In general, while almost all police services are supportive of NW, there is a wide variation in terms of the clarity and formality of links. On the survey evidence, it is likely that only about half of the 43 police forces have a clearly stated policy and few have adopted service level agreements or given clear and precise guidance to BCU commanders.

While it is obviously appropriate for each service to make its own decisions about how NW will be regarded, a mechanism for sharing good practice would be useful. Ideally, a central resource would provide an accessible 'library' of policies and practices which could be used as models where required.

Practical measures of support

Both police services and CDRPs took a variety of steps to help sustain and promote Neighbourhood Watch – most commonly through attendance at meetings and very often through provision of premises or facilities for meetings.

A majority of both categories of respondents reported that they commonly attended NW meetings, or meetings called to establish new Watches. A majority provided premises and other facilities, helped with the provision of literature and local crime information, invited feedback and ideas from NWs. In general, police respondents were more likely to give assistance in most of the ways described than CDRP respondents.

It was noted that while only 50% of police services (and a much lower proportion of the partnerships – 47 out of 138) had declared policies in respect of Neighbourhood Watch, the presence or not of a policy appeared to bear little relationship to what was actually done to support local Watches. Indeed, among CDRPs, those without a policy generally appeared to be more supportive than those with a policy!

4.6 Use of ICT

Most police services appear to have adopted the use of some form of modern information and communications technology for the distribution of information about crime and related matters. All have websites: many have local-level systems such as 'bullseye' or ringmaster' for the distribution of information to Neighbourhood Watch members and others. In at least one BCU, the system is available, free of charge, not only to NW members but to any member of the public who cares to register for it. Increasingly, the internet (specifically e-mail) is becoming the preferred method of communication and of CDRP respondents, 47% said that they made use of e-mail circulation.

Examination of ONS data revealed that an estimated 11.9 million households (about 48% of the total) had access to the internet from home by the autumn of 2003 and that the figure had risen rapidly – from less than 10% of households in 1998. In October 2003, an estimated 58% of adults made use of the internet.

While this suggests that, given ease of use and extreme cheapness, e-mail may be the best available form of communication for NW and other neighbourhood initiatives, there may yet be a substantial minority of citizens who cannot yet take advantage of the system and it is probably in the nature of things that these will be concentrated among the elderly and among 'hard to reach' sections of the community. Dependence on email systems may thus tend to limit participation to those who have internet access and could exclude those sections of the community who would benefit most from NW. However, a survey in Suffolk, in late 2001 showed that while a minority of residents had internet access at that time, a large majority had telephone answering machines or services which could be used by systems such as 'ringmaster' for distribution of information by the police.

4.7 Constraints – why no Watch?

In the surveys of police and CDRPs, questions were asked about the constraints to NW organisation. Most commonly, the absence of NWs was attributed to 'apathy'. It was pointed out by some interviewees, however that this was not always a matter of regret. If a neighbourhood was relatively untroubled by crime, there was no perceived need to establish new mechanisms for dealing with it: and some police offices expressed the view that it would be a misuse of police resources to spend time and effort creating and sustaining a Watch where none was needed.

Other constraints mentioned were a 'lack of suitable community leadership', though this, again, may reflect a lack of need in some areas. In a few other cases, it was related to antipathy towards the police, or to fear of social disapprobation or even reprisals, against people who were seen to be involved with them in any way. Several interviewees drew attention to the problem of finding people willing and able to carry out the volunteer tasks associated with managing a successful and active Watch. They indicated that Watches were often dependent on one or two committed individuals: if they moved away, or stepped down for other reasons, the Watch was sometimes difficult to sustain.

In some other areas, Neighbourhood Watch was not viewed as an appropriate solution to the local crime and disorder problems. In some cases, people were concerned about reprisals or general social disapprobation arising from perceived closeness to the police; in others, there was an absence of suitable individuals to act as co-ordinators: in some more, it was said that the Neighbourhood Watch suffered from a poor 'image' being associated with snooping and noseyness. In a few cases, local community representatives opined that they had alternative structures and systems in place.

4.8 Alternatives to NW

Few examples were been found of other community-based organisations which perform the same functions as NW: this appears to be because, once these functions are identified, the active participants adopt the NW name, even while remaining a part of a wider association. There is, however, a degree of overlap, for many local organisations concern themselves with issues such as anti-social behaviour or environmental degradation, which are also of concern to some NWs.

No respondents or interviewees were able to identify organisations which they perceived to perform an *exactly* similar role to that of Neighbourhood Watch. However, there were numerous mentions of other local organisations which made some contribution to the fight against crime at the neighbourhood level. These included; residents and tenants associations, parish councils, crime prevention panels, other watch groups (pubwatch, shopwatch etc) ethnically based groups, housing associations, community groups, neighbourhood / community forums and youth organisations. The most commonly identified organisation by both Police and CDRP respondents were residents and tenant associations (38% of Police respondents and 67% of CDRP respondents). The majority of respondents indicated that all of the organisations highlighted had some impact upon crime and disorder issues particularly in conjunction with one another.

Example: South Hampstead & Kilburn Co-operative

This estate can be considered a striving neighbourhood, where there is a high level of alcoholism, cannabis use, unemployment and youth disorder. Interviewees displayed a particularly negative perception of NW suggesting that NW is a 'gimmick' that does not really work and that NW is an out of date idea. Although there had been attempts made to set up NW over the years these attempts had not been successful as a result of a lack of community interest.

Although interviewees suggested that there is no NW or formal community involvement scheme specific to the South Hampstead and Kilburn Co-operative, the voluntary chair of the Co-operative works in partnership with the Housing department of Camden council, the Police and the Estate Co-ordinator. This group meets and discusses estate-related issues and works together to address various problems. In particular they cited the value of ASB legislation in dealing with youth disorder on the estate. For example, they have had great success with one particular young man who was intimidating other residents. This young man has agreed to an ABC and representatives of the Co-operative have contributed to an action plan of support for him. This young man has showed a significant improvement in his behaviour and is no longer a problem.

Further partnership work that covers the South Hampstead and Kilburn Co-operative and four other estates in the area is carried out by SHAK (South Hampstead and Kilburn Partnership). This partnership brings together representatives from the local Police, Camden housing, neighbourhood renewal, youth teams, education department, residents and caretakers. The aim of this work is to address community safety issues and youth disorder in particular.

Youth disorder is of particular significance on the South Hampstead and Kilburn Co-operative: in order to deal with this problem the Co-op has secured funding of £250,000 to redevelop the youth centre on the estate that has not been used for 12years. It is hoped that this will serve as a centre for local young people where they can receive support for a variety of issues and gain access to a range of resources.

Example: Berwick upon Tweed

There is no NW in Berwick. There is however, a Pubwatch and a Shop Exclusion Scheme whereby people behaving inappropriately in pubs or shops are banned.

Why don't they have NW in Berwick?

Lack of commitment from the public and the Police

Berwick is a very rural area that is quite widespread it is therefore difficult to build communities relations and share information across neighbourhoods.

Low levels of crime

Lack of public interest

Police and LA cannot offer the support needed to run NW

Northumbria Police have recently begun to focus some attention on resurrecting NW. However the Borough Council are collectively reluctant to do so, questioning whether the outcome is worth the effort.

A more appropriate alternative to NW:

The CDRP is currently planning to produce a 'Community Safety Newspaper' that may offer an alternative to NW which is more appropriate for Berwick and may actually reach more community representatives without making demands upon their time and energy. This paper would be produced monthly and provide slots for:

The Police

Community Safety

Health

Education

DAT

This would provide communities with contact details for non-emergency reporting etc in a similar way to NW newsletters, it would also act as a consultative tool presenting the public with information re: what is happening in the area and giving them the opportunity to feedback re: how they feel about the issues covered.

The CDRP aim to consult every household in Berwick about the production of this paper, asking residents:

What they would like to see covered by the paper

How the paper should be published?

Should it be e-mailed?

Should it be posted through every letterbox?

Should it be placed in local libraries?

Berwick CDRP hope that this paper will offer an alternative approach to community engagement that is more appropriate for residents living in a rural, low crime area.

It is noted that few NWs were identified in neighbourhoods which have locally managed neighbourhood warden services. It is possible that these two approaches are seen as alternative solutions to local problems, with some communities seeking – and being in a position to secure - fulltime paid staff such as neighbourhood wardens to do what might otherwise be done through voluntary mechanisms such as NW.

4.9 Funding Neighbourhood Watch

At the local level, Neighbourhood Watch is fairly inexpensive to manage and maintain. Most watches depend upon volunteers and the costs of notepaper, public notices and signage, window display material etc are modest and can usually be met by donations or some local fundraising activities. One interviewee – a volunteer co-ordinator - remarked that £5 had been asked of each member on formation of the Watch: of the total collected, a substantial part remained unspent six years later.

In some cases, the police and/or local authorities offer small grant schemes to help – in the London Borough of Wandsworth, for example, the grant scheme is advertised on the Council's website and from a special crime prevention shop in one of the main shopping centres in the borough.

The main cost appears to be related to police or CDRP liaison with NW or the promotion or encouragement of new schemes. This has mainly been met from local mainstream budgets and many police services have set aside specific budgets to cover staff time etc. Some have also spent money on the production of literature: in Suffolk, for example, the Constabulary provides a useful and instructive booklet for NW co-ordinators.

Nevertheless, shortage of funds has been cited as a constraint to NW development in a number of cases – by police services, CDRPs and by interviewees of all types. An obvious response would be for the government to consider providing a central development fund upon which local activists could draw, subject to conditions, to help establish and maintain NWs.

But there are a number of arguments against this. First, where police and their partners have identified NW as an appropriate response to neighbourhood crime problems and have sought to promote the formation and maintenance of watches, they have in most cases been able to fund such development from existing resources.

Secondly, NW is inherently a community activity. Communities that want an NW can usually raise the small sums required through local activity and with a modest amount of assistance, much of it kind rather than in cash, from local authorities and from the police at the BCU level. No case was encountered, during this study, of any area in which an NW was desired but could not be formed owing to the unavailability of funds.

Thirdly, it should be recognised that fundraising activity, or payment of small donations, is often what NW members actually do as their way of contributing to the

Watch. Only a few people are able to offer the time and ability to act as co-ordinators or as officers of local associations: others may be supportive but short of time. The financing of NWs through government would detract from the important social element in NW activity which often derives from fundraising activities.

A scheme of grants – usually involving very small sums – would be expensive and difficult to administer centrally.

The selection of NW from the various methods available to deploy against crime is a local decision and not one that could easily be taken at the centre. It would be difficult to define appropriate, centrally enforced, criteria of grantworthiness to the satisfaction of all concerned.

A nationally administered grant scheme would distort expenditure and effort. There would be a tendency for local partnerships to select NW as a way forward, not on the basis of objective criteria or local need but because of the availability of funding: there is an observable tendency among some voluntary organisations and in local government, not to decide what needs to be done and then look for funding but instead, to identify funding sources and then choose to do that for which there is a grant available, whether or not it is wholly appropriate, or is the best course of action. A national scheme would exacerbate this.

Furthermore, a problem with any grant system is often that the more articulate get the money. Those with the skills and knowledge required to access the fund may well be from the areas that need it least.

Finally, the administration of a central fund, compete with the necessary set of criteria for funding would impose a degree of uniformity – the trend towards a ‘one size fits all’ approach – in a field where local decision making, locally determined priorities and freedom to experiment are all of the essence. For all of these reasons, central funding in general is not recommended.

The exception to this general position may be in those areas which suffer from high levels of crime and disorder, which appear to be most in need of additional work to engage local communities and where, hitherto, local partnerships have found it difficult to involve local people in active citizenship. Consideration of a special fund to provide additional resources to such areas should be dependent upon careful targeting and the development of precise criteria for assistance: in particular, such assistance should relate to innovation and experiment that would not otherwise be possible and should only be available as a part of a more comprehensive policy initiative which includes other elements alongside the formation of Watch schemes.

There are other ways in which central government can provide assistance and encouragement to the development of NW where it is a desired solution. These are discussed below.

4.10 Developing a Needs Based Approach

The apparent maturity of the NW system has called into question the degree and type of support required from the centre, be it from the Home Office or from the national association (NNWA). Given the local nature of the problems to be addressed and the policy of promoting active citizenship at the local level, the role of central government is necessarily to facilitate rather than to prescribe – government in partnership is better than ‘big government’.

The starting point for any new national policy should therefore be based on an assessment of what is needed by local organisations like Neighbourhood Watch.

Few of the respondents to the surveys or interviewees had specific demands for closer involvement or intervention from the centre. The primary needs of NW are largely met at the local level, by BCUs or CDRPs and the funding for such intervention as required is mainly met from local authority or police budgets or from local fundraising .

Those needs which might usefully be met on a wider scale were

- Training schemes – which might be centrally developed to avoid wasteful duplication of effort but delivered, at least in part, at local levels; training schemes might be made available both to volunteer co-ordinators and to the growing body of staff professionally engaged in support for neighbourhood level initiatives against crime and related problems;
- An information resource which would go beyond the limited remit of NNWA and Neighbourhood Watch and be shared with other local organisations concerned with crime and disorder problems and with anti-social behaviour and local environmental issues;
- Access to details of ‘good practice’ – not only for NW but for police services, CDRPs and other agencies.

Any action along these lines should begin with a thorough assessment of local needs, possibly based upon a more comprehensive survey of NWs than was possible on this occasion. Such a survey would specifically address the training needs of local co-ordinators. Police services should be asked to consider whether a national training scheme would be of benefit to the increasing numbers of both officers and civilian staff who specialise in community engagement with crime and disorder.

4.11 The Role of the National Neighbourhood Watch Association (NNWA)

The Terms of Reference required the project team to consider the capacity of the NNWA to adapt and change where necessary.

NNWA has played a significant role in promoting Neighbourhood Watch for some years but there is a view that this may now better done at a more local level, now that NW is so widespread and that other, more local organisations have taken on the promotional, organising role.

NNWA appears to limit its activities and interests to the now traditional concerns with crime and disorder rather than the wider social concerns such as anti-social behaviour, environmental degradation and community support for the elderly and vulnerable. On the other hand, NNWA had joined with others (the Co-op, The Home Office and Crime Concern) in 2003 in launching and leading the national 'Taking a stand' awards which are directed at anti-social behaviour.

NNWA's relationships at local level are almost exclusively with Neighbourhood Watch and there is less contact and co-ordination with other key actors, such as social landlords, local authorities, ethnic minority groups, tenants and residents associations.

In fact, few of the NWs contacted had any regular contact with NNWA, though they and their members may have used the NNWA website. The NNWA itself appears to maintain contact largely with regional or sub-regional associations rather than with NW groups themselves, having a contact list of some 25,000 names and addresses (compared with at least 150,000 schemes) Some were critical of the NNWA's 'top down' approach, which was seen as an attempt to impose an approved structure rather than accept the diversity of needs and solutions at local level.

In the surveys and interviews of police services, CDRPs and local Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators and officials, no direct questions were asked about the NNWA as it was not the intention to 'lead' responses. But the NNWA was mentioned by respondents on a number of occasions and these responses were noted. Surprisingly, such unprompted mentions were not complimentary and in at least two cases, were hostile.

Two visits were made by project team members to the NNWA headquarters in London; senior staff were interviewed and the Association provided a great deal of helpful documentation. In addition, a thorough examination was made of the NNWA website at 'neighbourhoodwatch.net' which is the NNWA's most commonly used form of communication with the outside world.

NNWAs 'mission statement' is

To make Neighbourhood Watch a centre of excellence for Community Safety

and its strategic objectives are defined as

To champion the Neighbourhood Watch Movement and support key members and partners in reducing crime and improving community safety

To develop NNWA policy, programmes and best practice

To represent the Neighbourhood Watch movement nationally (to government, the media, business, other agencies and the wider movement) in order to achieve greater public participation and awareness of our aims

In assessing the capacity of the NNWA, the project team has examined each of these issues and the outcome of these considerations is set out below

Publicity - The NNWA Website

So far as publicity is concerned, the website is easily found. Any search engine in the UK responds to 'Neighbourhood Watch' by identifying the 'neighbourhoodwatch.net' site. *(There is also a 'neighbourhoodwatch forum' which appears to be the sole interest of one person in Wales and another in Sweden and which does not appear to have been maintained for at least eighteen months)*

The website is attractively and professionally presented and provides useful information, particularly for persons contemplating the formation of a new Neighbourhood Watch. The links to websites set up by individual Watches are a particularly useful resource.

But there are some deficiencies. The first is that it has not been kept fully up-to-date. For example, the latest report from the director general was nine months old when the site was visited by project team members and the latest news item was three months old. Some items were confusing – for example a model constitution is offered, but on examination turns out to be more suitable for an association than for an individual Watch.

There is a very useful and well-prepared set of training materials but it is not immediately obvious as it is not signposted or mentioned at the entry to the site and is, in fact, difficult to find. Nor is there any information about the extent of take-up of the training materials. None of the volunteers interviewed during this study had received training directly from NNWA though it may be that this material was used by others, such as local associations.

NNWA has made some attempts to engage with young people through the website, on which a scheme sponsored by Marks & Spencer Plc is advertised. But the detail pages appear to be missing altogether from the site and no further information was provided.

The extent of 'good practice' guidance – apart from the clear exception of guidance on establishment of schemes – is very limited. This may be a function of the limited resources available to the Association – a more widely applicable resource, which would benefit areas without Watches, may be a solution to the need to disseminate examples of good practice more widely.

Commercial endorsements

There is a substantial 'commercial' section of the website which gives rise to some causes for concern. First, it is asserted on the website that the NNWA has 'chosen' not to accept public funds. Information obtained by the Urbecon project team suggests that this is not true. Second, the site appears to offer licences to use the NW logo as an endorsement for commercial products: there is some uncertainty about the ownership of the logo and thus of NNWA's right to but in any case, it may not be considered wholly appropriate for it to be used to market products – particularly since the NNWA has no system in place for testing such products for fitness, reliability or safety before providing such an endorsement. Nor does there appear to be any mechanism for making customers aware that such apparent endorsement as may be

given or implied by the use of the logo has been purchased, rather than earned through proper assessment.

The main concern here is that the site does not distinguish between what is advertisement and what is genuinely editorial matter, as is the usual convention in news/advertising media.

In offering commercial opportunities, the site purports to offer access to ten million members. This is a misrepresentation. 'Membership' of local Neighbourhood Watches is ill-defined and carries few if any obligations and in many cases involves no more than providing a name and address for the receipt of messages from the co-ordinator or the police. The ten million cannot sensibly be offered as a coherent group for marketing purposes. More important, it is quite wrong to suggest that NNWA can offer any form of direct access to these people: the full circulation list of the NNWA is said to comprise just 25,000 individuals representing some 16,000 Neighbourhood Watches.

Organisation

Despite its name, the NNWA is not a national 'association' in the commonly understood sense, with a substantial and representative membership. A company limited by guarantee, it appears to have just 48 members: though many of these are said to be representative of regional associations, the means by which they are chosen and become members, or are elected to the board of trustees, is unclear and is certainly not widely publicised.

The website invites co-ordinators – or indeed others – to 'join' NNWA but the act of 'joining' does not confer the usual benefits of 'membership' of an organisation such as voting rights, consultation about policies and actions, involvement in decision-making, access to financial and other information. Visitors to the site who wish to join are directed to a form which offers only 'affiliate' membership, with no details of how full membership can be gained. In effect, all that most people join is a mailing list.

This gives an impression of an 'Association' which does not invite or welcome full membership. There appears to be a lack of transparency and an absence of democracy and accountability. There is some evidence from both surveys and interviews that the organisation is seen not as a genuine 'association'.

Furthermore, little evidence was found of systematic consultation with local watches or co-ordinators to enable an accurate assessment of what local NWs actually need, or to enhance the representative capacity of NNWA and so fulfil the stated objective '*To represent the Neighbourhood Watch movement nationally...*'

The point has been made, during the course of this project, that the NNWA is not adequately resourced to conduct itself in a different manner. But the accounts provided for the year ended 31 May 2002 (the latest available) showed an income of some £1,080,562 and a balance carried forward of £290,497. It is surprising that more of this balance was not devoted to membership development, which might have yielded more dependable funding in the future.

All this gives what may be a less than fair impression of what is, undoubtedly, a group of committed people who have, between them, been of good service to the community. It does, however, suggest a need for a careful and thorough review of the organisation, its role and functions, its organisation and constitution and its plans for the future. An independent review would assist the organisation to overcome some present difficulties and to initiate a coherent plan for future development.

5. Conclusions

The first and most important conclusion to be drawn from this investigation is that Neighbourhood Watch is alive and well, popular and well known. It is widespread, being evident in every region, but there are still many areas in which it does not operate. There is evidence that it is in fact growing - after a brief period of decline in recent years and that some at least of this growth is beginning to occur in areas in need of greater community engagement in issues of crime disorder and anti-social behaviour.

Such growth is mainly attributable to the active encouragement that Neighbourhood Watch has received from local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and most particularly from the police. A clear majority of the police forces contacted appears to see Neighbourhood Watch as an important component in their efforts to engage local communities in action against crime and disorder. However, not all police services or (CDRPs) have a clearly stated policy towards Neighbourhood Watch.

Active support from the police, mainly through the employment of staff to promote and facilitate watch organisation, has been the most important stimulus to expansion. It has also led to examples of good practice and innovation.

There is a wide variation in police attitudes to Neighbourhood Watch, though a majority of forces appear to be supportive to a lesser or greater degree. There is no call for a common policy - police and their partners should decide at the local level what methods suit them best – but a means of sharing experience information about examples of good practice would be helpful. A centrally managed information resource, in which an accessible library of good practices was stored and regularly updated, would be valuable.

The impacts of Neighbourhood Watch are difficult to gauge. Effects upon the level of crime are uncertain. It may be that the greatest value is that of reassurance – making people aware that the police are concerned about their problems and helping to restore confidence in the police service and by so doing, increasing the extent of police-community co-operation.

What is strongly apparent is that Neighbourhood Watches contribute to social solidarity and to the social capital of those neighbourhoods in which they are active. They provide scope for mutual support and help neighbours to get to know one another and provide an opportunity for people to make a practical contribution to their communities.

There is still a strong impression that Neighbourhood Watch is more prevalent in lower crime areas and is difficult to promote in deprived, high crime locations but it is clear that some police services are actively engaged in altering this, through closer and more regular engagement with communities that need help and integrating neighbourhood watch into the 'package' of activities undertaken in the target areas.

They could do more. There are encouraging signs that some Neighbourhood Watches or associations have increased the scope of their activities to comprehend a wider social agenda, including care for the elderly and vulnerable, involvement of young

people, action against anti-social behaviour and addressing environmental degradation.

But these are comparatively few. In most cases NWs appear to adhere to the now traditional role of reporting on crime and disorder, providing some intelligence and background information to the police and helping to disseminate information and advice, notably about crime prevention activity. But Neighbourhood Watch is widespread and is reasonably well understood. It is probably one of the best available vehicles for promoting related initiatives and policies, such as the 'Together' campaign against anti-social behaviour.

There are some potential downside risks. Neighbourhood Watch can be a consumer of police time and effort and may lead to misdirection or misallocation of resources when local activists demand and receive police attention in comparatively low crime areas to the detriment of more deserving high crime areas and 'hard to reach' communities. Many police services are aware that this has happened – and, indeed, it has adversely affected the reputation of Neighbourhood Watch, with the result that it has an 'image problem' among some police officers and among some sections of the public.

However, there is clear evidence of police efforts to overcome this problem and to direct attention towards neighbourhoods in which there is a greater need. Some have adopted innovative and creative approaches to this. The willingness of police services to employ dedicated officers and staff dedicated to NW development has helped this process. There is a growing body of men and women developing this specialist area of work and it may be that there is a growing need for nationally available training and professional standards.

Neighbourhood Watch is a contribution, not a solution. Where there are crime problems, NW is just one of a range of possible responses: it may not be the best approach in every case and where it is adopted, it should be seen as a part of a co-ordinated and targeted policing response.

The Neighbourhood Watch 'badging' is useful as it is well known and understood but is not essential. Neighbourhood Watch is an organisational method and a range of functions. What is important is that organisations are representative of the community and that the desired functions are carried out: what they are called is less important and in many areas, terms such as 'Home Watch' and 'Community Watch' are preferred.

While Neighbourhood Watch is clearly the preferred vehicle for community engagement in crime-related issues in many areas, it is not the only mechanism available, nor is the Neighbourhood Watch, even where it is strong, active and well organised, the only community-based organisation concerned with crime. It appears that in some cases, efforts to promote or sustain NW have detracted attention from other lines of approach, such as support for tenants and residents associations. Ideally, these groups will all be involved by local partnerships and encouraged to work together.

There is, at present, no established national system for sharing information and involvement in community-based initiatives against crime, nor is there a national resource for providing information about good practice. Such a system could be created, at very modest cost, bringing together national representatives of all or most of the local organisations concerned with crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour. Such a system is recommended below and an outline of how it might work is set out in Appendix 3.

In summary, it is apparent that Neighbourhood Watch continues to make a useful contribution to dealing with crime problems in many areas. Where it meets the perceived needs of citizens it should be encouraged to continue at whatever level local people find appropriate. But there is, now, a wider agenda to be addressed at the neighbourhood level. Apart from crime – the ‘traditional’ concern of Neighbourhood Watch – there are concerns about disorder, fear of crime, anti-social behaviour. These are linked to issues of environmental degradation, maintenance of the built environment and the management of public domains. This suggests that there is, now, an emerging demand for a new model of neighbourhood organisation.

The development of new models may be assisted by a lead from the centre but it is primarily dependent upon the promotion of active citizenship. It is unlikely that there would ever be sufficient resources from government, either centrally or locally, to tackle all the quality of life concerns of every neighbourhood. Nor, indeed should there be, for the essence of safe, secure and improving local life must lie with the people themselves.

6. Recommendations

The recommendations set out below flow from the findings and conclusions set out in section 6 above. They are grouped according to the requirements of the original Terms of Reference for the project.

6.1 What do the police need to do to bring about effective engagement and co-operation with Neighbourhood Watch to encourage active citizenship

These recommendations must be prefaced by the observation that many police services are already fulfilling all or most of them.

6.1.1. Police services and local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships should have a clear policy statement outlining their attitude to Neighbourhood Watch and the degree of support that they are able to make available to watch schemes; (Examples such as the Norfolk 'Policy and Procedural Guidance' and the Devon & Cornwall Service Level Agreement should be considered as alternative models of approach.)

6.1.2. Police should endeavour to integrate Neighbourhood Watch with other anti-crime and disorder initiatives or schemes at the neighbourhood level; where watch schemes are absent, or perceived to be inappropriate, consideration should be given to alternative forms of organisation which can fulfil similar purposes;

6.1.3. Special care should be taken to direct resources toward localities and persons with greater need, such as high crime areas and areas of deprivation;

6.1.4. Police services and CDRPs should consider the training needs of officers and civilian staff engaged in community engagement and the possible requirement for professional standards;

6.1.5. Consideration should be given to a system for noting and logging examples of good practice and for the sharing of such good practices within and among services; (This may be shared with the national forum proposed below.)

6.1.6. A system of registration of Watches and similar community-led initiatives should be put in place at BCU and the numbers of schemes in place reported, at least annually, to police headquarters. The numbers should also be collected annually from police services by central government so that growth or decline can be monitored and investigated where necessary.

6.2 What does Neighbourhood Watch need to do at all levels to ensure effective support and co-operation with the police and

6.2.3 Individual Neighbourhood Watch schemes and local and regional NW Associations should consider what steps might be taken to form closer relationships with other voluntary and statutory organisations operating services at the neighbourhood level;

6.2.4 Individual schemes should consider to what extent they should broaden their activities, or join with others, to comprehend the wider social agenda, such as anti-social behaviour, environmental concerns and care within the community for elderly and vulnerable persons;

6.3 What does the NNWA need to do to ensure effective support for Neighbourhood Watch

6.3.1. The National Neighbourhood Watch Association should commission an independent review of its functions and structure, with particular reference to its representational capacity and accountability;

6.3.2. NNWA should carefully review its policy and practices in respect of product endorsement;

6.4 What should central government do to help Neighbourhood Watch to become a more effective partner and encourage the police to engage more effectively with such organisations.

6.4.1. The government should encourage CDRPs to bring Neighbourhood Watch and other organisations concerned with anti-social behaviour and environmental issues together at local level to share experience and concerns;

6.4.2. The government should also consider bringing together a similar range of agencies at national level to develop a 'joined up' approach to neighbourhood problems;

6.4.2. Pursuant to this, the government should examine the feasibility a new 'national forum' to address the development of community organisations which are concerned with issues of crime and disorder, along with related matters such as anti-social behaviour and environmental degradation at the neighbourhood level. Such a forum would promote the exchange of information and good practice through a new national resource, perhaps by the operation of a publicly accessible web-based library and by occasional conferences;

6.4.4. The government should not provide grants from central funds to Neighbourhood Watch as such but should consider funding, in exceptional cases, innovative strategies for increasing community involvement in action against crime and anti-social behaviour in specific areas of proven need;

6.4.5 Consideration should be given to a needs survey of Neighbourhood Watch schemes to include information and training needs;

6.4.6. The potential need for training and professional standards for staff of CDRPs and police services involved in community engagement should also be examined.

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