

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Agenda Item 6

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

8th January 2013

<p style="text-align: center;">COMMUNITY SAFETY & LEISURE SCRUTINY PANEL REPORT INTO NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH</p>

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 The purpose of this report is to present to the Overview and Scrutiny Board the enquiries, conclusion of proposals from the panel's Scrutiny into the Neighbourhood Watch.

OVERALL AIM OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

- 2 The overall aim of the Scrutiny Investigation was to assess the impact Neighbourhood Watch had on the reduction in crime and the fear of crime. The panel also wanted to identify the level of involvement by residents of Middlesbrough and if Neighbourhood Watch in Middlesbrough was as active as other areas in the Tees Valley.

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

- 3 The Panel determined the Terms of Reference for this Scrutiny into Neighbourhood Watch which is presented as follows
 - What contribution does Neighbourhood Watch make to actually reducing crime
 - What evidence is there that Neighbourhood Watch actually reduces the Fear of Crime

BACKGROUND

- 4 The panel had identified the topic of Neighbourhood watch as a subject they wanted to pursue following their engagement with the Police regarding the application of Police resources in Middlesbrough during a time of severe financial pressures. The panel knew that Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) was originally introduced to the UK in the 1980s and has been established in the Cleveland area for some years. Although, the panel was aware that Neighbourhood Watch existed in Middlesbrough it was unclear how active it was but more importantly, how it contributed to the reduction in crime and how it involves the local community.

SCRUTINY

- 5 The Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel commenced its Scrutiny into Neighbourhood Watch by inviting Cleveland police who reference and present the issues of Neighbourhood watch on their web site. The Police web site is indeed the source of information to the community and the service, which receives information from Neighbourhood watch. The panel also wanted a balanced view and hence invited representatives who were presently active in Neighbourhood watch. Following this the panel gained information from a collective meeting involving the Police, the Problem Solving co-ordinators and the local Council.

EVIDENCE RECEIVED

Police

- 6 The panel invited a police inspector from Cleveland Police to attend who gave an outline of Neighbourhood watch in Middlesbrough. The basic thrust of a Neighbourhood Watch scheme is that it is designed and run by members of the public and should it be desired, any individual, business or group of residents could set up a scheme. They were intended to bring communities together with a shared aim of making areas safe, friendly and pleasant places to live. They were also intended to assist the Police with community engagement through giving and receiving information and community intelligence. There were currently 124 Schemes in Middlesbrough, however the membership, at 1824 members, was relatively low in relation to neighboring authorities, such as Stockton, which had 28,000 members.
- 7 Each of the four Cleveland Police Force areas have NHW Schemes which are managed by a District Co-ordinator. Policy and strategic direction of NHW was under the remit of Community Justice under the

Partnerships and Communities Inspector. Approximately a year ago, Cleveland Police Force amalgamated its Neighbourhood Watch Liaison Officer role with that of the Problem Orientated Policing Co-ordinator to create a new role of Neighbourhood Problem Solving Co-ordinator (NPSC).

- 8 The aim of amalgamating the roles was that each individual would be more closely aligned to the Community Safety Partnership and help use NHW to assist in resolving problems in the Community. The NPSCs would work with the Community Safety Partnerships to identify problems within an area and implement solutions with assistance from NHW Co-ordinators and volunteers. Each NPSC had a database of NHW contacts, which they send information via the Ringmaster system. Ringmaster allowed the user to send out information via email, voicemails and text messages.
- 9 Each District had a NHW Executive Committee and one Chair represented the whole County. It was highlighted that there had been some problems in Middlesbrough with the Chair of the NHW Committee Executive. The membership of the Committee had reduced significantly and although it had recently been awarded £10,000 from the Big Lottery, the Committee itself was not currently functional. The Neighbourhood Policing Team Chief Inspector was working with the Executive Committee to come to a solution as to a way forward for the Committee to work in partnership with the Police.
- 10 The panel inquired as to how NW was publicized and ensuring residents are aware, the panel was informed that the image of NHW was in need of an upgrade as it currently had a low profile within Cleveland Police literature and publicity and generally membership was from an older demographic.
- 11 The Safe in Tees Valley organization has submitted an outline bid for £500,000 of funding to enhance NHW in Cleveland by involving all primary schools, targeting hard to reach communities and addressing diversity gaps in membership of NHW. It was intended that a Junior Neighbourhood Watch scheme, which operated successfully in neighboring authorities, would be extended to all four Districts. It was hoped that by engaging with children from a young age they could be diverted from committing crime and anti-social behavior and also act as a means of engaging with their parents and families to relay crime prevention messages. Funding would also be provided to each NPSC to go towards community engagement schemes.
- 12 Other future developments included expanding the use of social media. Feedback to scheme members who had provided information on incidents had been identified as an area that could be improved. It was also acknowledged however that the information flow generally was from the Police to the NHW, with little information provided back to the Police.

- 13 Facebook and Twitter sites had been established which could potentially widen the number of people with whom NHW engaged. A particular focus would be on further involvement of young people.
- 14 Campus Watch, aimed at University students was also being implemented in Middlesbrough. Using the Student Union and social media, messages were relayed to students about crime and anti-social behavior. There was generally an increase in theft of mobile phones, purses and occasional assaults during term-time. The importance of balancing the information sent out was stressed, as crime was relatively low.
- 15 A Panel Member noted that recently the number of messages sent out to NW members had dropped dramatically. It was explained that the decision as to what messages were sent out was made between the Neighbourhood Teams and the Problem Solving Co-ordinator. Previously, NHW members had complained of receiving too many messages and it was a delicate balance between sending too much information or not enough. Details of all the crimes committed in every Neighbourhood were listed on the Police UK website.
- 16 Going forward, it was recognized that NHW was in need of expansion and quality improvement. It was stressed that the Police would only deal with officially elected and constituted NHW organisations and would support them in any way they could.

Local Neighbourhood Watch Representatives (Middlesbrough)

- 17 The previous meeting raised a number of operational issues and that the Police Inspector had conveyed that Middlesbrough has low membership. Additionally, some concerns were noted regarding the NHW Executive Committee, which were apparently now in the process of being addressed. Consequently, the panel wanted to engage with some of the local representatives directly to identify how their involvement was affected by the Police and the Executive.
- 18 A number of local representatives (local co-ordinators) attended the meeting to respond to enquiries and present additional detail. The panel was informed that the first scheme in Middlesbrough was started twenty two years ago and was formed in response to the high crime rate. Every household covered by the scheme was a member and there were approximately 600 houses. Originally, the NHW Scheme had held an Annual General Meeting and all members were invited which made the meetings well attended however, for the past three years not all participants had been invited and a representative Committee had met instead.
- 19 Over the years, in conjunction with the Police, the NHW had helped introduce prevention measures such as alarms, door locks and security lighting. The introduction of these measures, along with awareness

raising to encourage people to secure their houses and cars, had contributed to the current low crime rate in the area.

- 20 For the Neighbourhood Watch scheme to be effective it was dependent that information was passed on from the Police to all householders via the Ringmaster system. The information was filtered by the NHW Co-ordinators to ensure that it was relevant to the area and in some cases it was not forwarded in case it might cause alarm or distress. It was explained to the panel that the Ringmaster system had been tagged on to a Council system and it was noted that the previous dedicated system was preferred by that particular NHW scheme.
- 21 The present scheme was in the process of development and the local representatives voiced concerns that it appeared anyone could sign up to be a NHW Co-ordinator and start a scheme, without any Police checks being required. In addition, although the national website described NHW as a partnership between Police, Local Authority and residents, there was no structure in place in Middlesbrough to communicate with, or co-ordinate, different NHW schemes.
- 22 However, the panel was informed that the communication with the Police was poor and this made it difficult to establish a Neighbourhood Watch scheme. The local representatives believed that this may be due to budget cuts and that the Police full time coordinator has been replaced with a part time civilian post.
- 23 The representatives for Middlesbrough pointed out that the problems in each neighborhood were often very different and that NHW schemes were best applied at local level in a defined area. In the past, the Police had hosted meetings for Middlesbrough NHW Co-ordinators but several of the people in attendance were not involved in schemes and the meetings had not proved particularly useful as each NHW area had its own problems.
- 24 Reference was made to a neighboring Local Authority, which held monthly meetings for all NHW Co-ordinators and also had a junior NHW scheme, which was in place and operating.

Joint meeting Police, NH Co-ordinator, Neighbouring Area, and Council

Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator Neighboring Authority

- 25 The Problem Solving Co-ordinator (PSC) from Stockton, outlined the operation of Neighbourhood Watch in the Stockton area and informed the panel that around 9 years ago records showed Stockton had over 40,000 members. However, analysis found duplication and once audited the actual number was around 18000 members. This has now grown to a present day membership of approximately 27,500 members with records being updated every 2 years.

- 26 Members were informed that a number of years ago a new communication system was introduced which many members were unhappy about and demonstrated they wanted to retain the Police system. As a result membership started to decline. However, today the Ringmaster system is used to convey messages to members. This is also supplemented by using Facebook and Twitter. The panel found an interesting development was the purchase of bluetooth proximity equipment, which provided free messages to mobile phones via bluetooth to anyone walking within range of the control terminal. Stockton Police had also purchased similar equipment. In addition to crime prevention alerts it was useful for promoting Neighbourhood Watch events.
- 27 The panel was informed that the success of Neighbourhood Watch was dependent upon the residents and how they wanted it to run. The coordinator has worked closely with Stockton's Anti-Social Behavior Teams, Neighbourhood Policing Teams and Councilor's to encourage residents to set up their own Neighbourhood Watch schemes. It was found that generally if one or two people in a street joined, many more would sign up and the Street Co-ordinator would receive information from the Police and disseminate this to the rest of the members. The importance of communication was highlighted and often neighbors who had not spoken to each other for a number of years would start to interact and essentially start building the local community. The Coordinator approaches the Council for funding and if the Council is unable to help then alternative funding sources are suggested for local schemes.
- 28 The panel raised the issue within their terms of reference regarding reducing the fear of crime, to which the coordinator considered that Neighbourhood Watch did help to reduce the fear of crime. The PSC referred to a covert scheme that had been set up in response to drug dealing taking place in an upstairs flat. Local residents had provided descriptions of people going into the property and car registrations and within six weeks a warrant was obtained and the drug dealers evicted. Whilst Neighbourhood Watch members were not Police Officers, they could be the eyes and ears of the community and more people were taking responsibility for their own property. The panel was informed that some insurance companies offered a discount for Neighbourhood Watch members. Schemes were also established in areas where crime was very low, in order to ensure that the area remained that way.
- 29 Members raised that perhaps people might not want to join a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme for fear of reprisals from others. In response it was explained that Neighbourhood Watch could operate covertly as well as overtly. The youngest member in Stockton was seven and the oldest was ninety-seven, with the average age been around forty years old. Some established residents' groups in Stockton had renamed themselves as Neighbourhood Watch Schemes as this enabled them to receive the free communications from the Police.

- 30 Members inquired about youth involvement and in response were informed that Stockton had a very successful Junior Neighbourhood Watch, which was run by volunteers. Members were then informed that in addition to the Junior scheme Stockton had also developed a Councilor Watch where all Councilors were on the messaging system so that they received relevant information.

Police

- 31 The Police Inspector provided a brief history of Neighbourhood Watch in Middlesbrough. Reference was made to the implementation of a previous communications system, which had led to many people leaving Neighbourhood Watch in Middlesbrough. It was also highlighted that there were currently unresolved issues within the Neighbourhood Watch Executive Committee and it was not currently functioning. The Committee had obtained £16,000 in funding through the Safer Homes scheme but the money had not yet been spent. The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) had barred Police representatives from having contact with the Executive Committee until an investigation into the Executive had been completed. Efforts were now being made to establish a new Neighbourhood Watch Executive Committee in Middlesbrough.

Middlesbrough Problem Solving Co-ordinator

- 32 The Co-ordinator, who had only been in post one year and outlined that three or four new Neighbourhood Watch members were now being recruited every day in Middlesbrough. Additionally, an audit of the current membership in Middlesbrough was underway and at the present time there were 5957 active members. The PSC's role included promoting Neighbourhood Watch and seeking help from different partner agencies including Erimus, the Council, and Neighbourhood Safety Officers to resolve problems. In addition to this the PSC had recently set up a Campus Watch for students at Teesside University who were often at risk of unsecured burglaries.
- 33 The panel was informed that there are four PSCs across the Tees Valley and monthly meetings took place to enable information sharing. Although it was appreciated that ideas which may work well in one district might not work so well in another. Reference was made to a Neighbourhood Watch scheme in North Yorkshire, where members paid a £10 joining fee to enable the scheme to be self-financing. It was clarified that Neighbourhood Watch was a registered charity run by volunteers but assisted by the Police. In operational terms the panel was informed that the Council also provides some administrative support and assisted in trying to get people working together. To assist in the communication and co-ordination the Police are represented on the Safer Middlesbrough Partnership and each of the Working Groups.
- 34 It was emphasised by all representatives present that the key to successful Neighbourhood Watch schemes was communication. The

majority of communications were sent via email as there was no cost. It was acknowledged that this did eliminate some people from receiving messages, however text messages were expensive to send. It was agreed that leaflets were probably the best form of contact, however, this was also costly. Social Networking sites Facebook and Twitter were also being used as a way of raising the profile of Neighbourhood Watch amongst younger people.

COMPARING and CONTRASTING

- 35 The panel wanted to compare the position of Middlesbrough with the other Councils within the Tees Valley to get a measure of the relative membership and therefore the involvement of Communities in Neighbourhood Watch. The panel looked at the statistics of the different Councils and found that Middlesbrough had significantly fewer members. Indeed from the information provided by the police it indicated that Middlesbrough had less than half the membership of Hartlepool around 10% the membership of Redcar and only 6% the membership of the Stockton membership. This information was immediately concerning to the Panel and hence embarked on obtaining additional information. Once the panel had gained later and apparently analysed figures it found that the Middlesbrough membership was not as low as indicated but still less than 25% of the Membership at Stockton.
- 36 From the above information, the Panel decided they wanted to engage with representatives from Stockton to explore the reasons behind the significant difference in membership.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 37 The Panel addressed the two Terms of Reference during their lines of enquiry and an outline of their findings are as follows: -
- What contribution does Neighbourhood Watch make to actually reducing crime

Comment

The panel found that Neighbourhood watch made a positive contribution to the reduction of crime in Middlesbrough. There had been reference that Neighbourhood Watch was the eyes and ears of the police and that the general supply of information to local communities ensured greater vigilance and an enhanced focus on security. Examples of providing descriptions and vehicle registration numbers had enabled the Police to take swift and decisive action and curtail criminal activity.

The panel also found that the representatives would inform and assist residents in the provision of Alarms and Locks to improve security.

- What evidence is there that Neighbourhood Watch actually reduces the Fear of Crime

Comment

The panel found that communication was a key factor for the involvement and effective use of Neighbourhood Watch. The communication to the Police and other Neighbourhood Watch areas improved the awareness to tackle crime. However, the information conveyed from the Police to local areas equally placed crime into perspective and reduced the fear sometimes prevalent when not appropriate. With reducing crime rates in Middlesbrough, from the information received, the panel found that this message does reduce the anxiety in some communities and predominately in the elderly population. The panel considered this to be a very positive tool in improving the feeling of wellbeing for people of Middlesbrough.

CONCLUSION

- 38 The panel had previously received information on the affect budget pressures is having on Police resources in Middlesbrough and also how the crime rate is presently low in Middlesbrough. In recognition of this the panel wanted a greater understanding of the function of Neighbourhood Watch and the impact these schemes have on the local area. Therefore, the panel wanted information from a range of sectors to ensure a balanced understanding could be achieved.
- 39 The panel found from the initial evidence that there were serious issues relating to the Neighbourhood Watch Executive for Middlesbrough. Basically, the panel was informed that the Executive had lost focus and was causing problems with the Police. In addition to the problems with the Police the panel found that the Executive had not been functioning for over a year due to internal tensions. When the panel engaged with the individual representatives for Neighbourhood Watch areas they were not even aware that there was an Executive as they had only dealt with the Police directly. The panel found this concerning that local representatives were not aware of the structure of neighbourhood watch.
- 40 The panel found that there was little evidence of a formal structure to the Middlesbrough Neighbourhood Watch although it was clear the recently appointed Problem Solving Co-ordinator was making significant steps into this area.
- 41 The panel also found the take up in Middlesbrough compared to other areas was very disappointing and that although the Problem Solving

Co-ordinator was addressing this there was little general marketing to promote Neighbourhood Watch in Middlesbrough. The panel was informed that there may be a historic barrier in Middlesbrough due to the problems it has encountered. However, the panel believes with a structured approach and positive marketing and encouragement this would be overcome. Indeed the panel was encouraged to find that the Police had appreciated that the profile and publicity for neighbourhood watch required improving. Although, the recently appointed Problem Solving Co-ordinator for Middlesbrough had been proactive in increasing resident participation into Neighbourhood watch and that the present membership was nearing 6000, good publicity could only assist with assisting in this direction.

- 42 The panel found that there appeared to be adequate communication from the Police to the area NW representatives on the issues of crime and feedback was working reasonably well. This was appreciated by both the Police and local representatives which all identified the role of NW as being the eyes and ears of the local community. However, the panel was informed that one of the reasons why people left the Neighbourhood scheme in Middlesbrough was due to poor communication. From enquiries, the panel found that the general issue of communication regarding the structure of NW in Middlesbrough and the role of the Executive together with an understanding of the function of the Executive was lacking. Consequently, this may have contributed to the low membership in Middlesbrough.
- 43 The panel addressed the issue of tackling the fear of crime. Although the distribution of information to local representative was beneficial the panel found that the neighbouring authority held meetings with the local community and these were found to be very effective. The panel considered that consideration should be given to establishing these as the membership in Middlesbrough grows.
- 44 The panel is aware that there is an initiative to increase student participation and indeed has commenced with a scheme called "Campus Watch". The panel endorsed this approach but was unclear how swiftly or successful the initial endeavours have been and would want to see this area developed.
- 45 The panel was informed that £16,000 had been secured for Neighbourhood Watch in Middlesbrough and at the time of the meeting this had not been spent. The panel was greatly encouraged that this money had indeed been secured and would encourage the key partners to meet to arrange for the appropriate expenditure to benefit the neighbourhood Watch engagement with the local community and improve residential awareness and security generally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 46 Following the panel's engagement regarding Police resource in Middlesbrough the panel looked at the issue of Neighbourhood Watch and how it contributed to tackling crime. In undertaking this Scrutiny the panel found that, in general, Neighbourhood Watch can make a substantial contribution to tackling local crime and also addressing the fear of crime. The panel did find that the take up of membership in Middlesbrough was concerningly low and that there are substantial problems with the Executive. The recent appointment of the Problem Solving Co-ordinator is clearly a positive move in the right direction and already the membership is starting to increase. However, the panel has identified a number of recommendations which are considered will contribute to improving the awareness and service Neighbourhood Watch provides.
- 47 (A) That the Police, PSC and Council meet to resolve the problems and tensions with the Executive which has caused the recent fragmentation. That a structured and operational Executive be established with clear guidelines and that all local representatives are aware of the structure, meeting dates and processes.
- (B) While appreciating the problems associated with budget constraints, the panel considers it is necessary to demonstrate a commitment and support to Neighbourhood Watch. Therefore consideration must be given to establishing the position of Problem Solving Co-ordinator as a full time position which aligns to the support and commitment provided with the neighbouring authority.
- (C) In recognition of the Police concern That the Police, PSC and Council draft a strategy which focuses on the improvement of marketing to contact the 130,000 residents of Middlesbrough for greater participation in Neighbourhood Watch.
- (D) Appreciating the initiative of "Campus Watch" that positive engagement be undertaken with the student population in or indeed around the University of Middlesbrough to encourage involvement with Campus Watch.
- (E) Communication is considered a major factor for a good Neighbourhood Watch scheme and therefore regular meetings, driven by the Executive are established. It is recommended that these be programmed and that notification be sent to all local representatives and that the Police and PSC attend to update on detail.
- (F) That a structured approach be undertaken to spending the £16k funds secured for Neighbourhood Watch in Middlesbrough and that this expenditure and the assistance it provides to residents is marketed and conveyed to the residential areas of Middlesbrough.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

48 The Community Safety & Leisure Scrutiny Panel is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of our enquiry. We would like to place on record our appreciation for the co-operation we have received from the following: -

D Maddison	Inspector – Cleveland Police.
S Hussain,	Local Neighbourhood Watch Representative
P McDermott,	Local Neighbourhood Watch Representative
M O'Donoghue and	Local Neighbourhood Watch Representative
B Onions	Local Neighbourhood Watch Representative
R Baker	Problem solving co-ordinator, Stockton
L Kelly	Problem solving co-ordinator, Middlesbrough
Insp Walsh	Inspector Cleveland Police

BACKGROUND PAPERS

49 The following background papers were consulted or referenced to, during this Scrutiny and in the compilation of this report:

(a) Panel Minutes of 15th August, 12th September, 10th October 2012.

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