

Neighbourhood Watch in Sussex – A New Model for Partnership

Creating synergy between Neighbourhood Policing and Neighbourhood Watch

1. Introduction

“Neighbourhood Policing is the single most important development within the delivery of policing services in recent years. The Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) movement is the single largest voluntary organisation in England and Wales, with a presence in many neighbourhoods across the country, and up to six million members. Given the overlap, it is natural to seek synergies between Neighbourhood Policing and Neighbourhood Watch”. ⁽¹⁾

Neighbourhood Watch began in Sussex in the late 1980's. Since then it has grown to over 200,000 households and 8,000 schemes. It is estimated that one-in-three households in Sussex are members of Neighbourhood Watch. The introduction of Neighbourhood Policing in Sussex marks a significant point in time for the delivery of policing services, and with it presents the opportunity to enhance the partnership between Sussex Police and Neighbourhood Watch.

The traditional link between Neighbourhood Watch and Sussex Police has been through Crime Prevention Co-ordinators (CPC). The 2010 Challenge Programme identified the partnership could be better supported through a central strategic post and local neighbourhood specialist teams. As such, from April 2008 a new model will be introduced and the CPC role phased out.

This paper sets out the model for how Sussex Police will now work in partnership with Neighbourhood Watch. It highlights current strategic issues that need to be addressed and how the new model will seek to address these, making a more effective partnership. It highlights the change will be incremental, rather than a step change approach, setting out changes in structure, working practices and communication which will be necessary.

2. Purpose of Neighbourhood Watch

Neighbourhood Watch exists to:

- Cut crime and the opportunity for crime and anti-social behaviour
- Provide reassurance to local residents and reduce the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour
- Encourage neighbourliness and closer communities
- Improve the quality of life for local residents and tenants ⁽¹⁾

This purpose fully supports the core principles of Neighbourhood Policing and as such provides the opportunity for significantly enhanced partnership working to reduce crime, anti-social behaviour and build safer neighbourhoods.



3. Drivers for Change

Chief Constable Frank Whiteley, ACPO lead for Neighbourhood Watch Matters in his recent report ⁽¹⁾, highlights the need to align Neighbourhood Policing with Neighbourhood Watch in order to maximise the full potential within Neighbourhood Watch.

In Sussex there are examples of outstanding work undertaken by Neighbourhood Watch. The Neighbourhood Watch Search Teams are but one example where the energy, commitment and public spirit of members of the community can make a tangible difference to supporting the police. However, the full potential within Neighbourhood Watch remains untapped.

In order to maximise this potential, there are key strategic issues which need to be addressed. Some are the responsibility of Sussex Police to address, others by Neighbourhood Watch, but most with agreement and partnership. The key strategic issues facing the partnership are:

- (1) Whether Neighbourhood Watch is achieving its purpose can not be objectively assessed. Anecdotally, there are excellent examples of initiatives undertaken by Neighbourhood Watch, however the level of engagement varies significantly across Sussex.
- (2) Neighbourhood Watch is co-ordinated through the Sussex Neighbourhood Watch Federation. However, there are difficulties with communication between the Federation and local schemes. Currently the Federation is West Sussex centric and needs to have representation across all Districts.
- (3) There is no consistency for how Neighbourhood Watch is serviced by Sussex Police across Sussex. Some Divisions have Crime Prevention Co-ordinators, some constables, others Crime Prevention Advisors.
- (4) There is no centrally held, accurate database for Neighbourhood Watch members. As such records are inconsistent and inaccurate, resulting in considerable back-office administration.
- (5) There is no identified individual in Sussex Police who has overall strategic responsibility for Neighbourhood Watch.
- (6) Neighbourhood Watch are not consistently used as part of community engagement or local problem solving, or represented on partnerships such as Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.
- (7) The process of developing and managing community intelligence from Neighbourhood Watch is inconsistent and does not routinely sit within the National Intelligence Model process.
- (8) There is no consistent method of communication between Sussex Police and Neighbourhood Watch. The existing "Ringmaster" communication system is no longer viable.

The need to address these key strategic issues, the introduction in Neighbourhood Policing and the changes brought on by the 2010 Challenge Programme, collectively act as significant drivers for change at this juncture.



Changes are needed to the structure, processes and culture of both organisations before full potential is reached. As such, four key changes have been identified which will seek to address these strategic issues and maximise the potential for partnership working:

- Strategic leadership for Neighbourhood Watch
- Development of central database and communication system
- Structural change to Neighbourhood Watch
- Ownership by Neighbourhood Specialist Teams

4. Strategic Leadership

Strategic leadership is vital to ensure the 8,000 Neighbourhood Watch Schemes are co-ordinated and synergy is created between Neighbourhood Watch and Neighbourhood Specialist Teams.

To achieve this, Sussex Police will appoint a Force Neighbourhood Watch Manager. This role will act as the Force lead for Neighbourhood Watch matters nationally and be the direct link with the Sussex Neighbourhood Watch Federation. The role will be responsible for creating a strategy in conjunction with the Federation, moving Neighbourhood Watch forward in the longer term. They will ensure consistency across the fifteen police districts, supporting and acting as the single point of reference for District Commanders and Neighbourhood Specialist Teams.

The Sussex Neighbourhood Watch Federation, led by an elected Chair, will have a nominated representative from each District. The Chair will take on a strategic role for Neighbourhood Watch in Sussex. The Federation will develop a strategy in conjunction with Sussex Police on the strategic direction for Neighbourhood Watch to ensure the national aims of Neighbourhood Watch are met.

5. Database & Communication

An information system will be introduced to manage a database of Neighbourhood Watch members. The system will aim to use the internet to enable members to register and update their records on-line, negating the need for police staff to maintain databases.

The system will have the facility to pass messages to Neighbourhood Watch members and others on Key Individual Networks. Disadvantages associated with the traditional "Ringmaster" voice system of messages not being accurately and quickly discriminated will be addressed. Email and internet will be the primary method of communication, with options for text and fax where necessary. It is anticipated the system will be in place by June 2008.

6. Structure

In his report, Chief Constable Whiteley ⁽¹⁾ recommends Neighbourhood Watch and police structures should align at force, basic command unit, CDRP, neighbourhood and street levels. At present the structure of Neighbourhood Watch is not consistent across Sussex and does not reflect police structures.

There is significant benefit in aligning police and Neighbourhood Watch structures: Consistency across Sussex; effective partnership working; sharing of best practice; and effective communication at the strategic, tactical and operational levels.



A structural change is sought as reflected in Appendix A, in which local Neighbourhood Watch households are overseen by a street co-ordinator as is the case now. Street co-ordinators are overseen and supported by an Area Co-ordinator. Area Co-ordinators sit on a District NHW Committee and each district is represented on the Sussex Neighbourhood Watch Federation.

7. Neighbourhood Specialist Teams

At each level within the Neighbourhood Watch structure, liaison with Sussex Police will be made. The Force Neighbourhood Watch Manager will link in through formal meetings with the Sussex Neighbourhood Watch Federation and District Committees across Sussex. The local District Commander or their nominee will formally meet with the District Committees. Neighbourhood Specialist Teams will be the link with co-ordinators at the neighbourhood and street level.

The Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) will be the link with Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinators at the local level. They will have the responsibility to ensure relationships are developed, effective communication exists, schemes are registered and initiatives, in support of the overarching strategy, are taken forward.

8. Timeframe for Change

The change process will take time to implement and as such there is likely to be a short term dip in effectiveness. However it is anticipated by April 2009, structures should be in place and the partnership will significantly enhanced. The timeframe, shown in Appendix B, will be reviewed at six monthly intervals by the partnership.

9. Conclusion

There is significant opportunity within Neighbourhood Watch to assist in meeting the aims of Neighbourhood Policing. The new model seeks to address the current strategic issues which are preventing development and provide a platform for the future. By creating synergy and working more effectively in partnership at the strategic, tactical and local levels, the full potential of Neighbourhood Watch can be realised, helping to keep Sussex safe.

Robin Merrett

Assistant Chief Constable,
Sussex Police.

Brenda Whitmell

Chairman,
Sussex Neighbourhood
Watch Federation.

Bob Tidy

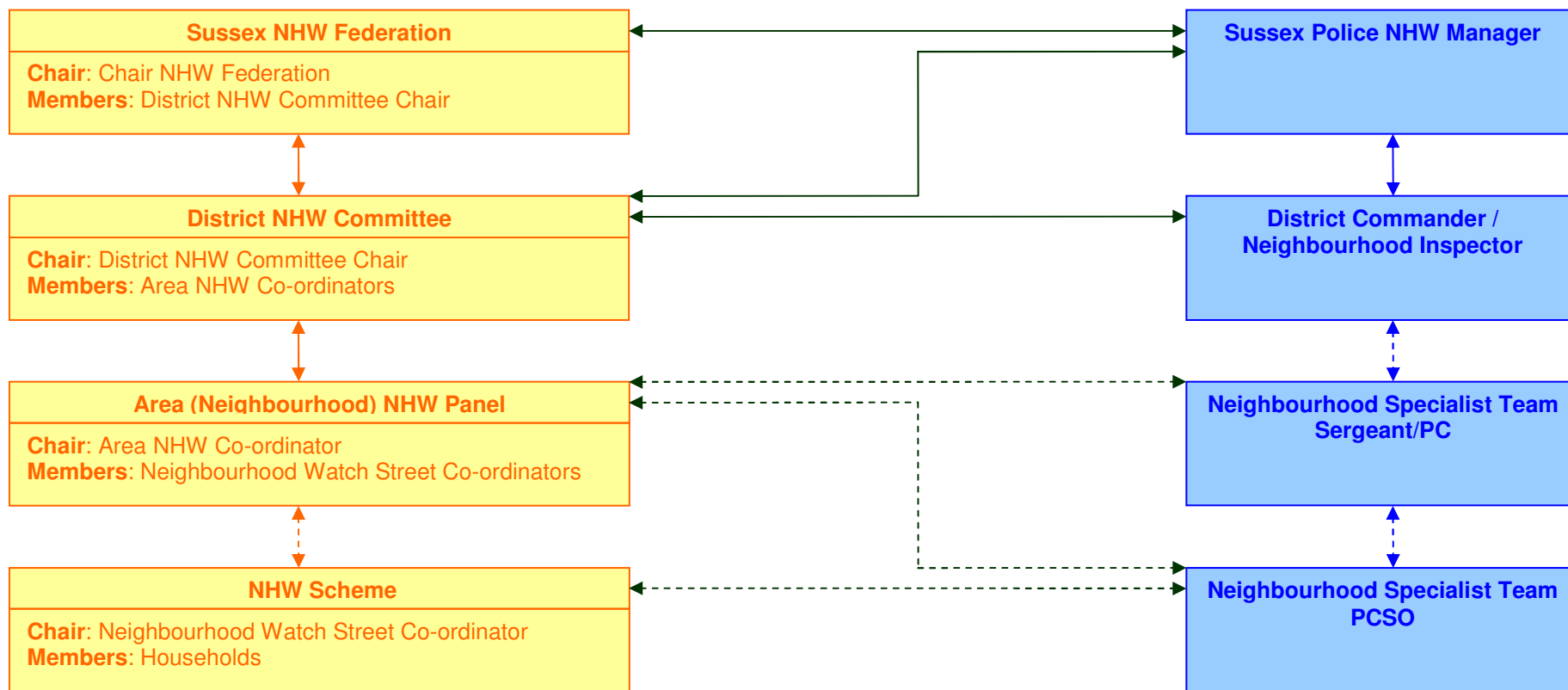
Lead Member for Community
Engagement & Neighbourhood
Policing, Sussex Police Authority.

(1) **Whiteley (2008)** *Briefing Paper: Neighbourhood Watch in Context A Strategic Tool for the Neighbourhood Policing Agenda.* Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO).



Appendix A

Inter-relationship between Sussex Neighbourhood Watch Federation and Sussex Police



Formal meeting cycle



Informal Links (email, face-to-face, Blogs, phone)

NB: Following implementation of new IS communication system, contact will be available from any police level to any Neighbourhood Watch level.



Appendix B

Changes to Address Strategic Issues

Strategic Issue	Changes to address issue	Timeframe for change	Responsible
1 At present, whether Neighbourhood Watch in achieving its purpose can not be objectively assessed. Anecdotally, there are excellent examples of initiatives undertaken by Neighbourhood Watch, however the level of engagement varies significantly across Sussex.	Central Police NHW Manager Strategic leadership from NHW Development of strategy including performance management framework	June 2008 April 2009 April 2009	NHW & Sussex Police
2 Neighbourhood Watch is co-ordinated through the Sussex Neighbourhood Watch Federation. However, there are difficulties with communication between the Federation and local schemes. Currently the Federation is West Sussex centric and needs to have representation across all Districts.	Structural change to NHW	April 2009	NHW
3 There is no consistency for how Neighbourhood Watch is serviced by Sussex Police across Sussex. Some Divisions have Crime Prevention Co-ordinators, some constables others Crime Prevention Advisors.	Central Police NHW Manager NST responsibility for NHW	June 2008 April 2008	Sussex Police
4 There is no centrally held accurate database for Neighbourhood Watch members. As such records are inconsistent and inaccurate, resulting in considerable back-office administration.	New IS on-line registration of NHW co-ordinators	June 2008	Sussex Police
5 There is no identified individual in Sussex Police who has overall strategic responsibility for Neighbourhood Watch.	Central Police NHW Manager	June 2008	Sussex Police
6 Neighbourhood Watch are not consistently used as part of community engagement or local problem solving, or represented on partnerships such as Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.	Structural change to NHW NST responsibility for NHW Central Police NHW Manager	April 2009 April 2008 April 2008	NHW Sussex Police
7 The process of developing and managing community intelligence from Neighbourhood Watch is inconsistent and does not routinely sit within the National Intelligence Model process.	Structural change to NHW NST responsibility for NHW Central Police NHW Manager	April 2009 April 2008 June 2008	NHW Sussex Police
8 There is no consistent method of communication between Sussex Police and Neighbourhood Watch. The existing "Ringmaster" communication system is no longer viable.	New IS Communication system	June 2008	Sussex Police

