

DEVON AND CORNWALL POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

Subject: Scrutiny of “Is the significant decline in Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in Plymouth reflected across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly – and if so, what is the Police and Crime Commissioner doing to address it?”

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Executive Summary:

In accordance with Section 28(6)(a) of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, the Police and Crime Panel (PCP), is responsible for scrutinising and supporting the actions and decisions of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). The PCP meeting on 6 February 2015 agreed a ‘reactive’ Scrutiny topic “**Is the significant decline in Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in Plymouth reflected across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly – and if so, what is the Police and Crime Commissioner doing to address it?**” The scrutiny review is to be undertaken adopting a ‘select committee’ style approach.

In liaison with the Chair of the PCP, the Host Authority has conducted, on behalf of the PCP, a range of direct engagement with communities, Neighbourhood Watches (NHWs), and other organisations across the force area. This has been carried out to determine whether they think the decline in NHW Schemes in Plymouth is reflected across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly – and if so, what they think the Police and Crime Commissioner should do to address it.

The Host Authority has acquired some additional relevant information from the Police in Plymouth and at Force level (Appendices 6 and 7) to assist the PCP in scrutinising this topic.

In preparing for this scrutiny topic, the Host Authority has taken account of the legislation, Panel Arrangements and Rules of Procedure, and Local Government Association Guidance¹.

Recommendations & Reasons for recommended action:

It is recommended that the PCP:

- adopts a select committee style approach to scrutinise the issue of “Is the significant decline in Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in Plymouth reflected across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly – and if so, what is the Police and Crime Commissioner doing to address it?”
- delegates responsibility for drafting the panel’s findings and proposed recommendations to the host authority, in consultation with the Chairman which will be provided in a final

1

report to be formally reviewed and agreed at the next meeting of the PCP. This report will be made available to the PCC in draft form.

The above reflects the PCP role to effectively and robustly scrutinise the PCC's decisions in an open and transparent manner and ensure that issues of mutual concern or interest can be shared in a way that is both constructive and supportive.

Alternative options considered, and reasons for recommended action:

An alternative would be not to undertake a reactive scrutiny role which would limit the PCP's influence on the issue of "Is the significant decline in NHW Schemes in Plymouth reflected across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly – and if so, what is the Police and Crime Commissioner doing to address it?" This would mean the PCP is not fulfilling its function in legislation² to carry out investigations into decisions made by the PCC and into topics of particular interest, or public concern.

Further Information:

http://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/neighbourhood_watch_evaluation_final_report_-_nov._2007.pdf

[http://www.ourwatch.org.uk/uploads/general/Measuring_NHW_-_Views_of_Effectiveness_\(2009\)_Richard_Slatter.pdf](http://www.ourwatch.org.uk/uploads/general/Measuring_NHW_-_Views_of_Effectiveness_(2009)_Richard_Slatter.pdf)

http://www.crim.cam.ac.uk/people/academic_research/david_farrington/nw.pdf

http://www.nottswatch.com/images/site_images/I5882_Appendix_D_Slatter.pdf

I.0 INTRODUCTION

² Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 s28(6)

- 1.1 On 2 February 2015 the PCP agreed its first 'reactive' scrutiny topic for 2015/16 would be "Is the significant decline in Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) Schemes in Plymouth reflected across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly – and if so, what is the Police and Crime Commissioner (P&CC) doing to address it?" It is considered appropriate not only to publically scrutinise this issue but in doing so to be offering support and acting as a critical friend. The scrutiny review is to be undertaken adopting a 'select committee' style approach.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On 11 July 2013, the PCP adopted some principles for selection of scrutiny topics. The Chair is satisfied that this scrutiny topic meets those criteria in particular:-
- **Public Interest:** the concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen for scrutiny
 - **Ability to Change:** priority should be given to issues that the PCP can realistically change
- 2.2 The Chair, in liaison with the Host Authority, agreed it would be useful to carry out, on behalf of the PCP, a range of direct engagement with communities, neighbourhood watches, the Force Lead for NHW, PCP members and other organisations across the force area. This has been carried out to determine whether they think the decline in NHW Schemes in Plymouth is reflected across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly – and if so, what they think the Police and Crime Commissioner should do to address it. This was carried out in two ways, as follows:
- 2.2.1 Firstly, consideration was given to contacting relevant agencies and organisations throughout Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly across a range of disciplines. A letter was prepared (**Appendix I**) and sent direct, including to the following agencies³:
- Local Authority Leaders and Chief Executives
 - Police and Crime Panel Members (asking them to cascade to their respective Council Member colleagues)
 - All Plymouth City Council Members
 - Cornwall Council's Community Network Managers as a means of liaising with Cornwall's Town & Parish Councils
 - Community Safety Partnerships
 - Age UK (Devon) and Age UK (Cornwall)
 - Victim Support
 - Devon & Cornwall Community Watch Association (DaCCWA⁴)
 - Devon Grapevine
 - Devon ReForm
 - South West Forum
 - Neighbourhood Watch (Plymouth)
 - Age UK Devon
 - Age UK Cornwall
 - Local Criminal Justice Board

³ This is not an exhaustive list.

⁴ The umbrella organisation for Devon & Cornwall NHWs)

All of the above were asked to forward to any other colleagues, partners, and agencies they thought might have something to contribute.

There were a large number of responses received, and these have been combined and are attached (**Appendix 3 and 4**).

2.2.2 Secondly, an 'open letter' from the Chair of the PCP was prepared and published (**Appendix 2**) for a time limited period on the Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel Website, containing similar content to the letter referred to in paragraph 2.2.1, seeking views from members of the public in respect of the proposals. It is not believed that any responses were received in response to the 'open letter'.

2.3 The engagement in paragraphs 2.2.1-2.2.2 above assists the Host Authority with identifying potential witnesses to add further value to the PCP's scrutiny process by them attending the meeting, giving verbal evidence and responding to questions from the PCP members. The Chair agreed with the Host authority that, on this occasion, witness attendance would add further value to the scrutiny of this topic, and therefore, the following witnesses have been invited to give evidence:

- Lorraine Robinson, Secretary to Plymouth NHW Forum
- Rob Paterson, former Chairman of Restormel District NHW Forum
- Julie Downton, Devon & Cornwall Community Watch Association (DaCCWA – the umbrella organisation for Devon & Cornwall NHWs)?

Witnesses have been fully briefed by the Host Authority and provided with a copy of the PCP's 'Witness Charter' (**Appendix 5**).

2.4 What stood out as the main points of feedback from the engagement exercise /responses received carried out in paragraphs 2.2.1-2.2.2 was:

- There is a perception of a reduction in effective NHW Schemes particularly in Newquay, Plymouth, Exeter, East & Mid-Devon, the previous "Restormel Borough Council" area in mid Cornwall, Launceston Town Council, Downton and Lanlivery. However, levels remain static in Devon's South Hams area.
- There were some views that 'NHW' was 'out-dated' and that future effectiveness was based on the use of more modern forms of technology for communicating with communities, eg use of internet and emails.
- NHWs need to be brought up to date with the multi-cultural and ethnic diversity needs of people living in Plymouth.
- A common thread was the perception of either reduced or withdrawal of Police support that was viewed as key to the central coordination of NHWs along with the provision of training, information (eg Starter Packs), coordination of/attendance at various NHW meetings, promotion of schemes to attract new members, and support for setting up new schemes. Some NHWs feel 'isolated' and not part of the policing family which may result in a further decline. There was concern that 'communication' with 'watches' was inconsistent and/or lacking.
- A couple of respondents mentioned the need for clearer structures and lines of 'governance and accountability'.

- There was a suggestion that maybe too much responsibility was being placed on DaCCWA to provide more coordination.
- DaCCWA themselves are of the view that they don't recognise the decline that has led to this being subject of this Panel's scrutiny. However, they acknowledge the decline in Plymouth but are working hard with local Police to address this, working with the recently appointed "Citizens in Policing" Office – viewed as a positive commitment by the Police in Plymouth to support and develop 'watches' and police volunteers. DaCCWA invited Panel members to get in contact with their Board in order to challenge their perceptions.
- There are a number of initiatives across Devon and Cornwall that have been implemented to either build on, or fill any gaps in, NHW coverage, for example 'Street Net'⁵ in Newquay, 'Neighbourhood Health Watch'⁶ in mid-Devon, and Torbay's 'Feel Safe Scheme'⁷ and 'Ourwatch Scheme'⁸, which appear to have been successful in their respective areas. Similarly a scheme between South Liverpool Homes (SLH) working in partnership with Merseyside Police offers a free scheme, called Immobilise⁹.
- There is a view that it is currently unclear how, or if, NHWs/ Forums/Schemes link in with the P&CC's Victim Care Unit.
- An idea has been put forward suggesting Community Safety Partnerships could explore how NHWs could be contributing, as part of a wider partnership, to the delivery of priorities in their Annual Strategic Assessments of Crime and Disorder.
- There do not appear to be any processes that measure NHW effectiveness, for example:
 - How many volunteering hours have been provided?
 - What training is being delivered to support volunteers?
 - Whether effective 'Watches' are being established in areas with the highest crime?
 - How do levels of crime compare between those areas with active and those with less or inactive watches?
 - The demographic profile of watch coordinators.
 - What difference is being made?

2.5 The Chair and officers from the Host Authority have considered what other information may be useful to the PCP when it scrutinises this topic. Three reports have been acquired as follows:

- Report from Inspector Paul Morgan (Force Lead for NHW), in respect of the force position in respect of this scrutiny item (**Appendix 6**).
- Report from Sergeant Miranda Dalton, (Plymouth Police lead) in respect of the local Police position in respect of this scrutiny item (**Appendix 7**).
- Report from the PCC (**Appendix 8**).

An officer from the Host Authority has also been keeping in close liaison with Police Officers who support the Plymouth NHW Schemes and the latest developments have been incorporated in paragraph 2.6 below:

⁵ <http://www.cornishguardian.co.uk/Newquay-police-launch-new-Street-Net-community/story-22863882-detail/story.html>

⁶ <http://www.neighbourhoodhealthwatch.org.uk/>

⁷ <http://www.torbaywatch.org.uk/>

⁸ <http://torbaynhw.ourwatch.org.uk/>

⁹ <https://www.immobilise.com/articles/fivemostwanteditems>

2.6 What stood out as the main findings from the additional information acquired in 2.5 above and from the discussions with Plymouth Police was:

- In the 1990s, there was more dedicated support in the form of a Police Sergeant who led coordination of NHWs. Following the civilianisation of this post 10 years later, this appeared to have led to resignations and folding of NHWs.
- The numbers of NHW Coordinators in Plymouth in 2006 was cited as circa 800 with roughly only 80 active at that time. However, the figure of 800 has never been substantiated. All areas see fluctuations in schemes, which often reduce markedly when personal details are audited. Sometimes figures cited include Coordinators and members which can distort the figures.
- Although records vary, and prior to the topic being scrutinised by the PCP, it was believed that there were in the region of 200 coordinators in Plymouth. In order to verify this, all 200 were contacted by the Police in March 2015 initially via email to confirm their involvement/interest – only 12 replied. Following this the remainder received a personal visit from the Police Neighbourhood Teams to gauge their interest/update contact details. This exercise has in fact determined the true level of involvement in Plymouth to be in the region of 142¹⁰ confirmed coordinators and in the region of 160 unconfirmed who the Police are still trying to make contact with. This is on a par with membership in other parts of the force area (refer to Appendix 6).
- At a Force level, the only record that is kept of NHW numbers is people who have registered as recipients of community messages¹¹. Hence that is likely to be why the numbers vary at a Force (359) and local Plymouth (circa 142+) level.
- In 2014, Plymouth appointed a Community Safety Sergeant and a ‘Citizens in Policing’ Officer whose role is to develop Special Constables, Cadets, Police Volunteers and NHWs. This role has been key to improving relationships and redesigning the focus between Police, the Plymouth NHW Executive Committee and DaCCWA.
- Plymouth has an allocated NHW office at Devonport Police Station co-located with the Police Community Safety Office and the Safer Plymouth Team and are provided with a Police terminal and landline solely for their use. The Plymouth Executive Committee has an ‘office volunteer’ but due to their recent illness, an additional volunteer is being sought.
- It is the intention of the Police and the NHW Executive Committee to re-launch NHW via Neighbourhood Teams, social media, a promotional event bringing together existing Coordinators and members, and engagement with partner agencies.
- As part of the re-launch of NHW in Plymouth, a new project is to be trialled, to be known as “Activ8”, in conjunction with NHW, which will encourage them to set up “walking groups” as a means to identifying issues in their respective areas, getting to know their ‘patch’, and promotion of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme. This will also have the benefit of building relationships between Coordinators and showing NHW as being truly active in within their communities.
- It is felt that the brand of ‘NHW’ still carries the old-fashioned connotation of ‘curtain twitchers’ and gives the wrong impression of what is involved/required and the real benefits and potential of what NHW Schemes can deliver. So some consideration will be given to refocusing the emphasis of the schemes in Plymouth to be more geared around health, wellbeing, and vulnerability and not just reporting crime.

The conclusion is that there has not actually been a rapid decline of NHW Coordinators in Plymouth, but that between the loss of the full time Police Watch Office Member, followed

¹⁰ As of 19.6.2015

¹¹ <http://www.devon-cornwall.police.uk/our-services/community-messaging/community-messaging-explained/>

by the long period of sickness of the Watch Office Volunteer that replaced the Police Watch Office Member, this has simply led to a reduction in regular contact with Coordinators and diminished support and communication which is now being addressed. It is very strongly felt that Coordinators should ideally have access to email and internet facilities in order to maintain regular communication and to assist with keeping membership records up to date.

From a Force perspective, they are of the view that Plymouth NHW is fully supported and there is 'no concern' as to the direction it is progressing in.

DaCCWA are aware that, whilst NHW within Plymouth was in need of reinvigoration, they are very pleased with the involvement of the local police who have been trying to achieve this. Additionally they do not support the view that there is a decline in NHW Schemes across the Force area as a whole.

The Chief Constable endorsed a "Citizens in Policing" Strategy for the Force at the beginning of 2014 agreed in conjunction with the OPCC. This strategy includes the desire to strengthen and support watch schemes and volunteers generally. Plymouth appointed a specific "Citizens in Policing" Officer to assist delivery to the City's needs. The NHW review in Plymouth will mean it is better positioned to deliver a vibrant watch Office now than at any time in the last 5-6 years.

3.0 NEXT STEPS

- 3.1 At this Panel meeting, the PCP will be asked to delegate responsibility for drafting the panel's findings and proposed recommendations to the host authority, in consultation with the Chair which will be provided in a final report to be formally reviewed and agreed at the next meeting of the PCP. This report will be made available to the PCC in draft form.