



SERVING STITHIANS COMMUNITY

You ask if there is a pattern to dwindling support for Neighbourhood Watch. I can't really answer that in a definitive manner, but I can certainly throw some light on the reasons that this might be the case based on our experience over the last few years.

I am the village coordinator for Stithians and we have a handful of local coordinators looking after small areas of the village. Much of the village has no local coordinator.

Fortunately we live in a very low crime area and that, in itself, may well contribute to the general lack of interest that we experience when looking to recruit members or area coordinators.

I will deal first with a brief history of our watch area, as there was much to discourage us in the early days, and then progress to the present situation.

In 2010 (as far as I can recall) the Parish Council decided that it would be a good idea to re-establish the "dwindled" scheme in the village. They called a meeting jointly with the Camborne Watch Office and some councillors and a few of us public attended the meeting to see what was involved. We left agreeing to undertake a letter drop in agreed areas to ascertain if locals wanted a scheme. The letters to be delivered took an inordinate length of time to be produced by Camborne Watch Office and some of us felt that nothing was going to happen. They did arrive and were duly delivered by each coordinator.

The replies were sent directly to Camborne and we heard very little for quite some time. Eventually they advised that there had been sufficient positive response and called a follow up meeting. We were appointed coordinators and we asked for a list of the folks in our areas that had replied in the affirmative. This was refused on the excuse that they couldn't divulge this due to data protection. We felt this to be a slap in the face and they were lucky we didn't all quit on the spot. I actually had a case where one person thought that he was a scheme member and ignored my notes inviting participation on the grounds that he had filled the form in and was, as far as he was concerned, already a member.

We were also told there was no funding and that if we wanted Neighbourhood Watch signs in the village we had to pay for them ourselves and get any necessary consents to display them. The Watch Office was keen to display their goods for sale.

All went quiet for some considerable time but eventually a letter arrived with each coordinator confirming their appointment. We were up and running and had a coordinator in the village (who has subsequently resigned out of frustration with "the

system” and been replaced by me). The few coordinators that there were tried to get additional volunteers but with little success. Coordinators who have resigned have not been replaced, reducing our penetration even further.

Each coordinator went off in their own direction with the then village coordinator taking a very light touch approach. Some relied on people contacting them as they were known in the very small areas they wished to cover. I set up an email system within my (larger) area and also dropped occasional newsletters to those that didn't have Internet access. I registered my sub scheme on the Ourwatch site and do get some useful updates from there, although I find the amount of advertising for the site sponsors a bit of a nuisance.

During the tenure of the then central coordinator we were moved from Camborne Watch Office to Truro Watch Office. We are covered by Falmouth Police, although I gathered recently that the neighbourhood aspects are organised from Helston. Unfortunately there is no communication between Falmouth or Helston and the Truro Watch Office so we get no useful input through them. My main source of information from the Police is via their Facebook pages!

When I took over as coordinator I increased the coverage of the Ourwatch registration to cover the whole scheme and set up a web site and Facebook and Twitter presence. Truro Watch Office were able to get our scheme upgraded on Ourwatch to give it a more official presence.

I do have good relations with a couple of the PCSOs from Falmouth and have successfully used the cadet force a couple of times for door knocking.

Attracting attention to our scheme has been a real uphill struggle. We have had coverage in the Village newspaper, the Parish Council Newsletter and the eNewsletter of the Stithians Centre (village hall) over some number of months, largely with no impact on penetration. One coordinator has had success in recruiting by knocking every door in his area and returning to those addresses where he did not get an initial result.

So: where are we now?

- We have a very small (diminishing) number of coordinators.
- We have support from the Parish Council with a Councillor liaison who is also an area coordinator.
- The Police have recently ceased the monthly crime reports that went to the Parish Council and central coordinator due to “time pressures” – the PCSOs have been reduced in strength by at least 50%.
- We get virtually no support from the Truro Watch Office (they made it clear that they couldn't cover us very early on as they are hard pressed with their own workload – given that they are also volunteers).
- Truro Watch office have said that they are trying to establish a Watch Office in Falmouth - but then said that they would look to us to volunteer to man it (No way as far as I am concerned as I am far too involved in other local organisations).

- Volunteers are very thin on the ground as with many organisations.
- Not all of our coordinators have or want internet access which is an issue.
- We have moved to a centrally produced eNewsletter format alongside the more frequently updated social media sites in an endeavour to get increased penetration across the whole community but progress is very slow.
- The website is a sub-domain of one of my sites and is provided gratis.
- We have advised those residents that used to get printed newsletters that they should get a friend or neighbour to enrol for our eNewsletters as we do not have the manpower or financial resources to maintain the delivery aspect.
- We now rely heavily on a very slowly growing eNewsletter, using a free newsletter production site, and the social media pages (also slow to grow) in addition to our web site.
- There is no formal structure for the organisation and so we have the coordinators meeting occasionally.
- With no funding of any kind from the top down it is unreasonable to expect anyone to print newsletters, flyers, etc., at their own expense.
- It is hoped to have a joint recruiting exercise with some other organisations in village that issue eNewsletters to try to increase penetration.

My feeling thus is that we are very much on our own (unloved and unwanted is the expression I have used to our Council liaison) and I fear for the future should I decide to give up for any reason as there is only really one of the coordinators who could step in and take over the coordinator duties and the web site, eNewsletter, social media, etc.

I see reports of great community interfacing at Newquay where there is apparently a very close relationship between the local police and their streetwatch scheme (which appears to bypass the Watch Office process).

It is clear that much depends on the management of each local Police Station and that there is a lack of uniformity even within the Devon & Cornwall Force area.

With the increased emphasis from the Police and Crime Commissioner on volunteers my feeling is that an improved and uniform structure is required within the police force to ensure that there is adequate support for the volunteers in the community. However I also understand the financial and manpower constraints within which Tony Hogg and the Chief Constable have to operate.

Vyv Toms (Mr)
Scheme Coordinator for Stithians.
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