

# Neighbourhood Watch Issues

**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 (PCC) doing to address it?**

## Force Position

Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) is but one of several such schemes supported by Devon and Cornwall Police. Farm Watches, Boat Watches, Horse Watches, Moor Watches, School Watches and a developing “Neighbourhood Health Watch are co-ordinated alongside NHW by the Volunteers who make up the Devon and Cornwall Community Watch Association (DaCCWA).

DaCCWA have negotiated the principle of “Watch Offices” being established within certain police premises and broadened the remit of such offices to handle enquiries about all watch schemes. Indeed, many of these offices are the places that Local Policing Teams go to both to survey and set up new schemes.

## Watch Office Locations

|            |             |
|------------|-------------|
| Penzance   | Camborne    |
| St Austell | Truro       |
| Launceston | Bodmin      |
| Torpoint   | Falmouth    |
| Newquay    | Plymouth    |
| South Hams | Teignbridge |
| Bideford   | Cullompton  |

## Watch Development

In addition, there are discussions ongoing about the reopening of a watch office in Exeter and a desire to reinvigorate the East Devon Watch Office and establish one at Barnstaple. Thus, whilst there are gaps in geographic coverage across the force, there is a desire from DaCCWA to fill these. The benefit of broadening the remit of such offices is becoming apparent as the plan is to support them to become “community hubs” where a series of volunteers in a variety of roles could operate from and interact with local policing teams.

DaCCWA has already taken on the purchase and selling of

- Watch Scheme signs
- Boat Engine Covers
- A variety of target hardening/lock/security equipment.

There is also a nascent development of them engaging in Quality Assurance activity in relation to ASB and low-level crime as well as local policing engagement processes. Perhaps the most impactful development has been the commencement of Neighbourhood Health Watches, working with NHS and GPs to establish supportive watches tackling isolation and vulnerability in the home and making sure people have meals, are safe etc.

## **Plymouth Issues**

Approximately 10 years ago Plymouth had the most active Watch Office in the force. It was staffed daily and supported by a full time member of Police Staff who also performed a Community Messaging System (CMS) role. This was when many watches were moved from only being recorded on a standalone computer in the office to being registered on CMS. In 2006 I believe that there were 800 schemes registered and moved onto Community Messaging. However, it is believed that only 80 of those were “Active” schemes responding to messages regularly.

With a number of force re-organisations, the CMS post responsibilities had to be re-defined and this did not include such direct involvement in running the Watch Office. Across the force, it was volunteers themselves who stepped forward and took on responsibility for the existence and running of each of the Watch Offices.

This was not replicated in Plymouth. Whilst an “Executive Committee” for the city has met over the past 5 years or so, it has been disconnected from the DaCCWA network, has not attended Board meetings or maintained any contact with the framework supported by the force.

The appointment of a new Community Safety Sgt and a “Citizens in Policing” (CiP) Officer in Plymouth does indicate an intention on behalf of Plymouth Police to re-invigorate their networks within areas such as NHW. However, this new support and scrutiny has led to challenges about what is in place to support watches and how the Executive Committee operates.

There is new Watch Office space at Devonport and the development of this office has been facilitated by the CiP Officer. This has enabled two afternoons a week to be dedicated to Watch issues. There have also been attempts to link Plymouth’s “Executive Committee” back into formal links with DaCCWA. Indeed, DaCCWA chairperson has been personally involved in the discussions about Plymouth’s development and is booked to participate in the formation of many new schemes.

All areas see fluctuations in the numbers of schemes they have. Frequently this will reduce markedly when personal details are audited.

## **NHW Scheme numbers**

Devon and Cornwall Police do not record the number of schemes that are registered in particular areas. That is left to the Watch Offices to manage. The only indication that we have within force is the record of "NHW Co-ordinator" recipients of Community Messages. This will provide a general figure, but is "self-declared" when people register to receive the messages and, thus, will vary from where Watch Offices are on top of this issue. There are still NHW co-ordinators/members who do not have email access and have not signed up to receive Community Messages.

## **NHW Co-ordinators listed on Community Messaging**

A snapshot of our CMS system has indicated the following:

| <b>AREA</b>    | <b>NHW Co-ordinators listed</b> |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| East Devon     | 496                             |
| Exeter         | 242                             |
| Mid Devon      | 298                             |
| North Devon    | 345                             |
| Torridge       | 311                             |
| South Hams     | 237                             |
| Teignbridge    | 269                             |
| Torbay         | 186                             |
| West Devon     | 94                              |
| Plymouth       | 359                             |
| North Cornwall | 163                             |
| Restormel      | 260                             |
| Penwith        | 115                             |
| Kerrier        | 120                             |
| Carrick        | 257                             |
| Caradon        | 193                             |

All records are still divided as per the old "Districts" before Cornwall became unitary.

## **Conclusion**

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

NHW is supported fully and there is no concern from the Police perspective as to the direction it is progressing in.

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