

Mr Tony Hogg  
Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon,  
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Please ask for: Sarah Hopkins

*My Ref RC/SH/Scrutiny 03/07/2015*

18 September 2015

Dear Police and Crime Commissioner,

**SCRUTINY BY DEVON AND CORNWALL POLICE AND CRIME PANEL IN RESPECT OF  
“IS THE SIGNIFICANT REDUCTION IN ENGAGEMENT OF NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH  
VOLUNTEERS 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?”**

I would like to thank you and your colleagues, on behalf of the Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel (PCP), for attending the Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel meeting on 3 July 2015 in respect of the above proactive scrutiny item. I hope you found the select committee style approach to the scrutiny process a useful mechanism, with the right balance of both support and challenge and a positive and useful exercise.

Following comment by the Chair and Vice Chair of the PCP, I am pleased to now provide you with the PCP's draft report of findings and recommendations for your consideration.

Please be advised that the report will be formally reviewed and agreed by the PCP at its meeting on 9 October 2015 and following the meeting (and in accordance with Section 28 (7) of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011) it will be published on the Host authority's website and on the Police and Crime Panel website. At the 9 October 2015 meeting you will be given an opportunity to verbally comment on and respond to the report. If however you also wish to provide a written response prior to the meeting, this response will need to be forwarded to Sarah Hopkins by not later than Friday 25 September 2015 and it will be included as an appendix to the report and reviewed accordingly by the Panel.

  
Yours sincerely

Councillor Roger Croad  
Chair, Devon and Cornwall Police & Crime Panel

Cc: Andrew White, Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer

(Plymouth City Council is the host authority for Devon & Cornwall Police & Crime Panel and views expressed by the Panel are not necessarily those of the Authority.)

**Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel (PCP) report to Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC) following scrutiny on "Is the significant reduction in engagement of neighbourhood watch volunteers 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?"**

**Introduction**

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 Section 28 (6) states that the Police and Crime Panel (PCP) must "review and scrutinise decisions made or other action taken by the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in connection with the discharge of their functions"

The PCP recognises the importance of supporting the PCC in the effective exercise of his functions.

The PCP, at its meeting on 3 July 2015 agreed the above issue as the first 'reactive' scrutiny topic for 2015/16. It was agreed the scrutiny review would be undertaken adopting a 'select committee' style approach.

The outcome/objective of the scrutiny exercise was as follows:

In relation to Neighbourhood Watch (NHW), to ensure the PCC is delivering on the following priorities:

- Greater Public Involvement in Policing/Active involvement by citizens and communities in policing  
- To encourage and enable citizens and communities to play their part in tackling crime and making their communities safer.
- Cutting crime and keeping people safe
- Making every penny count to protect long term policing

The PCP is satisfied that this scrutiny topic meets the PCP's agreed scrutiny 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

The PCC, accompanied by officers from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), attended a meeting of the PCP on 3 July 2015 to hear written evidence, in response to this 'reactive' scrutiny topic.

**Members present:** Cllrs Croad (Chair)

Councillors Batters, Brown, Boundy, Davey, Eddowes, Excell, Mathews, Mrs Pengelly, Saltern, Mrs Squires, Toms, Watson, Wright

**Independent Members:**

Yvonne Atkinson (Devon) and Sarah Rapson (Cornwall and Isles of Scilly).

**Apologies for absence:**

Councillors Moulson, Sanders, Sutton

**Also in attendance:** Sarah Hopkins, Community Safety & Partnerships Manager, Jo Heather, Democratic and Governance Officer, Cornwall Council, Peter Aley, Head of Neighbourhoods & Communities, Andrew White, OPCC Chief Executive, Dr Karen Mellodew, OPCC Performance

Management & Customer Service Manager, David Eaton, OPCC Strategy & Meetings Officers, Devon & Cornwall Police and Katey Johns, Democratic Support Officer.

### **Witnesses**

Tony Hogg, Police and Crime Commissioner, Inspector Paul Morgan, Force Lead for Neighbourhood Watch, Lorraine Robinson, Secretary to Plymouth Neighbourhood Watch Forum, Rob Paterson, former Chairman of Restormel District Neighbourhood Watch Forum, Julie Dowton, Devon & Cornwall Community Watch Association (DaCCWA).

### **Written Evidence**

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:

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 and sent direct, including to the following agencies<sup>1</sup>:

- 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 (DaCCWA<sup>2</sup>)
- Devon Grapevine
- Devon ReForm
- South West Forum
- Neighbourhood Watch (Plymouth)
- Age UK Devon
- Age UK Cornwall
- Local Criminal Justice Board

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, which were combined and were provided at the Panel meeting.

Secondly, an 'open letter' from the Chair of the PCP was prepared and published for a time limited period on the Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel Website, containing similar content to the letter referred to above 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'.

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<sup>1</sup> This is not an exhaustive list.

<sup>2</sup> The umbrella organisation for Devon & Cornwall NHWs)

The engagement assisted 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 were 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)?

What stood out as the main points of feedback from the engagement exercise /responses received 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, Downterry 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’<sup>3</sup> in Newquay, ‘Neighbourhood Health Watch’<sup>4</sup> in mid-Devon, and Torbay's ‘Feel Safe Scheme’<sup>5</sup> and ‘Ourwatch Scheme’<sup>6</sup>, 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 Immobilise<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cornishguardian.co.uk/Newquay-police-launch-new-Street-Net-community/story-22863882-detail/story.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.neighbourhoodhealthwatch.org.uk/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.torbaywatch.org.uk/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://torbaynhw.ourwatch.org.uk/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.immobilise.com/articles/fivemostwanteditems>

- 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?

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

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

An officer from the Host Authority kept in close liaison with Police Officers who support the Plymouth NHW Schemes and the latest developments were incorporated below:

What stood out as the main findings from the additional information acquired 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 142<sup>8</sup> 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 messages<sup>9</sup>. 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

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<sup>8</sup> As of 19.6.2015

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.devon-cornwall.police.uk/our-services/community-messaging/community-messaging-explained/>

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 was 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 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.

### **The Panel asked the Police and Crime Commissioner the following questions:**

1. What do you see are yours, and the Police's, role in supporting and promoting NHWs?
2. In your report, you say you jointly endorsed, with the Chief Constable, a "Citizens in Policing Strategy" that expresses a desire to strengthen and support watch schemes and volunteers generally. Are the public aware of this Strategy? How does the Strategy intend to deliver on this desire? It is understood the appointment of a "Citizens in Policing" (CiP) Officer in Plymouth is being used as a pilot for the Force, and this has already been effective in reinvigorating NHW Schemes in Plymouth. As a result, is it likely specific "Citizens in Policing" officers will be provided at each Watch Office across the Force?

3. Feedback reveals there is concern about the inconsistent approaches to coordination, support, promotion and a lack of communication with NHW schemes. What is your perception as to why many NHWs feel under-valued, and what are your suggestions for addressing this?
4. What support could you be giving to DaCCWA in filling the Watch Office gaps in geographical cover across the force area?
5. How could you support NHWs' future effectiveness based on the use of more modern forms of technology for communicating with communities that may encourage the recruitment of younger people?
6. What could you put in place to:
  - (a) better understand how crime differentiates between 'Watch' and 'Non-Watch' areas;
  - (b) measure NHW's effectiveness in reporting and reducing crime; and
  - (c) strengthen the numbers of NHWs in areas with the highest crime?
7. In Plymouth the Police and the NHW Executive Committee are intending to re-launch NHW via Neighbourhood Teams, social media, and a promotional event. How could you encourage other NHWs to follow suit and if so, what part will be play in the re-launch across the force area so that there is a consistent level of cover across it?
8. How do NHWs link in with the PCC's Victim care Unit?
9. The submission by the PCC on page 155 of the agenda pack is virtually identical to the submission from Inspector P Morgan on page 149 of the agenda pack. However Inspector P Morgan has ended his submission with the following statement "NHW is supported fully and there is no concern from the Police perspective as to the direction it is progressing in". Given that this statement is missing from the PCC's submission, can the Panel assume that the PCC does not agree with the statement and/or cannot commit to it?

**The responses/findings from the PCC's answers to the questions and the evidence provided by the witnesses and answers provided to questions asked to them have been combined and summarised as follows:**

- The support for NHWs provided by the Police is now much broader and revolves around provision of "Watch offices" within the police estate (of which there are 14 within Devon and Cornwall), enabling access to and use of office space and resources, supported by volunteers. The aim is that Watch offices become the focal point and hub for activities across the force area to enable NHWs' continued development so that they can be adapted to accommodate the changing focus of NHW, in particular from crime to wellbeing as a whole through the Neighbourhood Healthwatch Movement which is supported by GPs and has now been formalized through DaCCWA. This move is welcomed and supported by the Police who believe this is the right direction to be taking;
- Co-ordinator numbers could rise with better advertising and the establishment of hubs at watch offices;
- There are issues relating to communication and access to information by volunteers with the need for Co-ordinators and volunteers to be IT literate and be able to communicate by email so that information can be cascaded as quickly as possible;
- In Newquay, a neighbourhood communication system called 'Streetnet' has been created where beat officers are encouraged to go out and talk to their communities and establish community 'post boxes' from which information can be shared in both directions. This could be an alternative to the Police Messaging System;

- “Our Watch” is a national body to whom DaCCWA report and through which they can use the brand. The ‘Our Watch’ website could be an effective mechanism, through which Co-ordinators can communicate with each other and find new members;
- Although DaCCWA does not require significant operating funds, a monetary contribution towards the production of leaflets would be welcomed;
- There are concerns that with further closures of Police offices pending, this could have a negative impact on provision of NHW. Any premises where the Police office shares accommodation with Watch schemes should be identified to ensure appropriate arrangements are made to also move the Watch office to the new accommodation so that they remain located together. Resources and accommodation need to be supported by the Chief Constable;
- Use of community messaging systems should be broadened so that information can be obtained from other partners. The more agencies that engage, the wider the network and the greater the ability to share data and spread costs. Neighbourhood Alert, a national communication system, is one such example where information can be obtained from partner agencies;
- The PCC is of the view that the public very much has a part to play in community safety and his role is to champion and support them in that role in any way he can. Through the Chief Constable he can ensure that the resources are there to support watch schemes and community messaging;
- The Citizens in Policing pilot has been successful in Plymouth and the Chief Constable would be approached by the PCC about rolling the scheme out across the rest of Plymouth and potentially across the force area;
- It is acknowledged that there are some weaknesses where schemes have floundered due to lack of Police support. This has often occurred where Police have recruited from the PCSO role resulting in a gap in the community. It is an ongoing concern between the PCC and the Chief Constable and is part of his package of questions to the Chief Constable relating to neighbourhood policing, what it means, what can be put on partners and what ultimately cannot be done;
- There is no direct link between NHW and Victim Care apart from messages of alert and when there is a need to refer;
- With regard to the connection between NHW and Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs), the PCC advised that CSPs should have regard to the voluntary sector and so this could be where the connection could be and he could promote this aspect with CSPs;
- The PCC does not have any figures to show how crime differentiates between watch and non-watch areas as this is an operational area for which the Chief Constable is responsible, although a response could be provided to the panel;
- The PCC advised that he could support promotional events personally if he was able and perhaps provide a little money towards such events;
- NHW’s effectiveness in reporting and reducing crime needs to be measured;
- The numbers of NHWs in areas with the highest crime need to be strengthened;
- The PCC cannot say that he has no concerns in relation to NHW. This demonstrates a lack of joined up thinking between the PCC and the Police, as Inspector Morgan advised the panel that he has no concerns. The PCC needs assurance from the Chief Constable regarding what he is doing and likewise the PCP needs to be informed and assured. The Chief Constable needs to provide to the PCC what the definition of neighbourhood policing means and what the offer is.

### **The Recommendations:**

Having reviewed the written evidence, conducted a comprehensive and searching question and answer session between the PCP and witnesses, and the PCC and considered the responses/findings, the PCP makes the following recommendations to the PCC:



- 1) That the PCC champions and celebrates the role of NHWs and promotes and supports them as part of his volunteering offer in relation to the part the public can play in community safety, having regard to the following:
  - (a) With regard to Watch offices, that the provision of them (including access to and use of office space and resources) continues to be provided within the police estate and such offices are moved with any police station moves so that they remain located together. Also, that the aim for Watch offices to become the focal point and hub for activities is promoted including the change of the focus of NHW from just crime to wellbeing as a whole through the Neighbourhood Healthwatch Movement;
  - (b) That IT training for Co-ordinators is supported to ensure that they are IT literate and able to use email, whether through the provision of training or by a buddying system;
  - (c) That the use of the Our Watch website be promoted as a means of effective communication for Co-ordinators and Neighbourhood Alert be promoted as a means of sharing information with partners;
  - (d) That a monetary contribution towards the production of leaflets be provided to DaCCWA if possible;
  - (e) That the PCC ensures that CSPs in the peninsular have regard to NHWs as part of the voluntary sector;
  - (f) That the PCC supports NHW promotional events in person if able, providing money towards them if possible and considers a publicity relaunch of NHW via the media as part of his volunteering offer;
- 2) That the PCC provides the PCP with information regarding the following:
  - (a) What can be put in place to better understand how crime differentiates between Watch and non-Watch areas;
  - (b) What can be put in place to measure NHW's effectiveness in reporting and reducing crime;
  - (c) What can be put in place to strengthen the numbers of NHWs in areas with the highest crime
- 3) In relation to providing assurance to the PCC and PCP, that the Chief Constable provides a report to cover the following:
  - (a) What the definition of neighbourhood policing is and means, what the offer is, what can be shared with partners and what can and ultimately cannot be done;
  - (b) What resources and accommodation there are to support Watch schemes and community messaging;
  - (c) The feasibility of rolling out Newquay's Streetnet across the force area as a means of community messaging and communication through beat officers
  - (d) The feasibility of rolling out the Citizens in Policing pilot across the rest of Plymouth and potentially across the force area;

**Final comments:**

Section 28(7) of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 states that the PCP must publish any reports or recommendations. This report will be:

- Circulated to the Chair and Vice Chair for initial comment and then submitted in draft form to the PCC for consideration.
- And will then be formally reviewed and agreed by the PCP at its meeting on 9 October 2015. Following the meeting it will be published on the Host Authority's website and the Police and Crime Panel website with copies being sent to the Witnesses.