



## BRIEFING PAPER

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# Neighbourhood Watch

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## Summary

Neighbourhood Watch was first introduced into Britain in 1982. It works by developing close liaison between households in a neighbourhood and the local police. The schemes are known as either Neighbourhood Watch or Home Watch.

Schemes run themselves, and they do not have to register with the Government. However there is a register of coordinators and schemes across England and Wales, known as the Neighbourhood Watch Register, which is described in more detail in Section 3.

The movement works through Force Level Associations which are supported by a national organisation, the [Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network](#). The Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network was formed in 2007. A previous national charity, the National Neighbourhood Watch Association, was wound up in 2006 following funding difficulties and controversy.

As part of its policies on the Big Society and on police reform, the Coalition Government expressed the desire to encourage more participation in Neighbourhood Watch and similar schemes, as has Baroness Newlove, now the Victims' Commissioner and formerly Government champion for active and safer communities.

### **Funding**

The Home Office does not fund individual Neighbourhood Watch schemes, although it does provide funding for the national organisation. The Government also funds public liability insurance for those involved in local schemes. From April 2012 the Home Office passed on responsibility for Public Liability Insurance to the Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network.

# 1. What is Neighbourhood Watch?

Neighbourhood Watch originated in the USA and was first introduced into Britain in 1982. It began in the village of Mollington in Cheshire in response to a spate of burglaries, and then grew throughout that decade.

Neighbours work together to deter crime and anti-social behaviour, reporting suspicious behaviour and other information to the police. Schemes are run by their members and operate in different ways in different parts of the country. The national organisation, the [Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network](#) (NHWN) states that:

Our aim is to bring neighbours together to create strong, friendly, active communities where crime and anti-social behaviour are less likely to happen.

Our vision is that of a caring society that is focused on trust and respect in which people are safe from crime and enjoy a good quality of life. Neighbourhood Watch is about making sure that fewer people feel afraid, vulnerable or isolated in the place where they live.<sup>1</sup>

Neighbours work together to deter crime and anti-social behaviour.

## Number of schemes

Schemes do not have to register with the Government and so there are no centrally held figures showing how many there are.<sup>2</sup>

The entry for the Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network on the Charity Commission website states that “there are approximately 170,000 schemes across England and Wales.”<sup>3</sup>

The NHWN website says that Neighbourhood Watch has more than 173,000 coordinators, covering 3.8 million member households across England and Wales.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network, [Our Mission](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>2</sup> [HC Deb 8 November 2013 c371-2W](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>3</sup> Charity Commission, [Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network \(Activities\)](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>4</sup> NHWN, [Co-op Insurance Sponsorship](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

## 2. Coalition Government policy

The Coalition Government's 2010 police white paper, *Policing in the 21st Century*,<sup>5</sup> set out a series of proposed police reforms, notably "increasing democratic accountability" through the creation of Police and Crime Commissioners and reducing bureaucracy.<sup>6</sup> In the foreword, the then Home Secretary Theresa May stated that a "radical shift in power and control away from government back to people and communities" was at the heart of the Government's vision. The document said that the Government would promote "the range of ways that citizens can get involved in keeping their neighbourhoods safe and encourage them to do so":

5.10 Across the country, we want to support more active citizens: taking part in joint patrols with the police, looking out for their neighbours and passing on safety tips as part of Neighbourhood Watch groups or as Community Crime Fighters. More people will be advising the police as members of youth independent advisory groups, coming together as communities to sign neighbourhood agreements which set out the local commitments of services and communities to tackle crime and ASB, having more of a say in how money is spent (participatory budgeting) and in how offenders make amends (community restorative justice). And people are volunteering more formally across the whole criminal justice and community safety spectrum – as special constables, magistrates, police cadets and victim support volunteers to name but a few.<sup>7</sup>

In March 2011, the Coalition Government published its crime strategy which also promised to encourage participation in Neighbourhood Watch schemes:

Public cooperation, not just passive consent, is vital for the police to do their job well, so we will help the public to become more involved in keeping their communities safe. People do have a desire to get involved: the new street level crime and anti-social behaviour maps on [www.police.uk](http://www.police.uk) had 310 million hits in its first week and 75% of people who do not have a neighbourhood watch scheme in their area are interested in joining one. We will encourage the public to participate in Neighbourhood Watch schemes and volunteer as special constables, magistrates and victim support volunteers.<sup>8</sup>

In October 2010 Baroness Helen Newlove was appointed Government champion for active, safer communities. Her husband, Garry Newlove, had been killed in 2007 after a violent attack by teenagers outside the family's home. On 29 March 2011 she published a report which argued that there

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<sup>5</sup> Home Office, [Policing in the 21st century: reconnecting the police and the people](#), Cm 7925, 26 July 2010 [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>6</sup> See Library Research Papers 10/81, [The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill](#) and 11/28, [Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill Committee Stage Report](#) for further background on the Government's police reforms [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>7</sup> Home Office, [Policing in the 21st century: reconnecting the police and the people](#), Cm 7925, 26 July 2010, p36 [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>8</sup> Home Office, [A new approach to fighting crime](#), 2 March 2011 [last accessed 9 April 2018]

## 6 Neighbourhood Watch

was a public appetite for greater involvement with Neighbourhood Watch and other activities:

It is difficult to accurately estimate the number of people who are already actively involved in making their community safer as there are so many different national and local voluntary groups, as well as thousands of different tenants' and residents' associations, small community groups and individuals acting informally. But we do know there is real appetite to get more involved.

76% of those surveyed for the 09/10 British Crime Survey who did not have a Neighbourhood Watch scheme in their area said they would like to join one if it were available.

The survey of community crime fighters (local activists who are already involved in tackling crime) found that most were engaged in a whole range of different safety related activities. This suggests that once people get interested, they will take on a number of different roles. But it seems that we are expecting a small number of individuals to do too much.

Being actively involved in your community and helping to keep it safe needs to become the norm rather than the exception.<sup>9</sup>

The report made a number of recommendations about what should be done to encourage this kind of involvement:

As well as getting the public to report crime, act as a witness, and form community groups such as Neighbourhood Watch or a tenants and residents association, agencies should look at how they could encourage and support more local people to get more directly involved in the delivery of safety and justice in their area.

This could be as part of a street patrol with or without uniformed officers (for example StreetWatch24), by joining up as a Special Constable or police volunteer. It could be putting on sporting or cultural activities for young people to keep them from hanging out in the street or joining a community litter pick to make sure the area looks clean and tidy. It could be by helping to dispense justice, as a Magistrate or as a youth referral panel member.<sup>10</sup>

Baroness Newlove was appointed Victims' Commissioner in December 2012.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Helen Newlove, [Our vision for safe and active communities: a report by Baroness Newlove](#), Home Office, 29 March 2011, p8 [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p24

<sup>11</sup> [Baroness Newlove appointed as new Victims' Commissioner](#), *BBC News*, 21 December 2012 [last accessed 9 April 2018]

## 3. Organisation

The umbrella organisation for the movement is the [Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network](#), a registered charity which operates throughout England and Wales. It was set up in 2007.<sup>12</sup>

The Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network supports police force area Associations, known as Force Level Associations, which in turn support local schemes. “Force area” refers to the same geographic area covered by a police force.

Both the Force Level Associations and the local schemes are run by volunteers.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.1 The national charity

A national charity, the National Neighbourhood Watch Association (NNWA), was established in the 1990s with sponsorship from Norwich Union. However, when this company withdrew support in 2003, there were problems over replacement funding. At the same time there was a legal dispute over the use of the Neighbourhood Watch logo, which the NNWA had registered as its own trademark, whilst the Government argued that it had Crown Copyright.<sup>14</sup> The dispute, and the funding difficulties, prompted an adjournment debate on the issue in July 2004.<sup>15</sup> NNWA was wound up in 2006. For a short time, there was no national organisation.

The [Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network](#) was then set up in 2007.<sup>16</sup>

Its website, [www.ourwatch.org.uk](http://www.ourwatch.org.uk), was set up in June 2011.<sup>17</sup> It provides information and guidance on all aspects of the scheme. Its Knowledge Base is a convenient way to access all the information provided.<sup>18</sup>

The April 2012 edition of the NHWN newsletter described an increasing role for the NHWN:

The Home Office are passing on many of their previously held responsibilities for supporting Neighbourhood and Home Watch schemes to the NHWN. We have already taken on responsibility for promotional material, street signs and window stickers, and as from 1st April 2012, we assumed responsibility for Public Liability Insurance and the licensing of the Neighbourhood Watch and Home Watch logos and branding. ... This added responsibility is a sign that our status is well established and that we are truly the voice of Neighbourhood Watch and Home Watch in England and Wales.<sup>19</sup>

The national organisation is the [Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network](#)

<sup>12</sup> NHWN, [About us](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>13</sup> NHWN, [Force Level Association](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>14</sup> Home Office in ‘neighbourhood watch hijack’, *Daily Telegraph*, 11 June 2004 and [Crime watchers rebel at ‘hijack’](#), *Observer*, 5 September 2004 [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>15</sup> [HC Deb 6 July 2004 c812-20](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>16</sup> NHWN, [About us](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>17</sup> Home Office, [Neighbourhood Watch website launched](#), 21 June 2011 [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>18</sup> NHWN, [Knowledge Base](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>19</sup> NHWN, [Our News](#), April 2012 [last accessed 9 April 2018]

## 3.2 Force Level Associations

The NHWN is keen to support Force Level Associations.

A Force Level Association does not exist for every area; a list may be found on the NHWN website, together with guidance and information about setting up an FLA.<sup>20</sup>

Where one exists, the FLA gives information to local groups about the exact process for starting a Neighbourhood Watch scheme. This varies across England and Wales.<sup>21</sup> The role of the FLA is to provide:

guidance and, where necessary, policies on the details of how Neighbourhood Watch operates within their area. This includes things like deciding any processes new schemes need to follow and maintaining a good working relationship with the police at force level.<sup>22</sup>

The NHWN communicates with FLAs, rather than directly with members, so that the FLA “can deliver information to members as it sees fit, in a manner and timescale which fits in with local activity.”<sup>23</sup>

### Local schemes

Each local scheme has a coordinator:

who acts as the key contact point for the scheme. They liaise with the police, scheme members and the general public – for instance, people who are interested in joining the scheme – as well as non-member residents when necessary. A scheme may have more than one coordinator as long as members and police know who the key contacts are.<sup>24</sup>

There are no hard and fast rules about the size of a scheme:

This can vary depending on the geography of the area. A good rule is to think about which houses can see each other, so that they can keep an eye open for any suspicious activity. But some schemes don't fit into that model, such as long straight roads, blocks of flats and rural areas where houses are widely spaced, so choose what works best for you.

Clearly, many people live in blocks of flats. With regard to multiple occupancy buildings, the NHWN website refers to some research produced for the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention which may be helpful.<sup>25</sup>

There is information about fundraising and support in Section 5 of this Briefing Paper.

*Neighbourhood Watch Register*

Force Level Associations provide information and guidance to local schemes

<sup>20</sup> NHWN, [Force Level Association](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> NHWN, [Setting up a NHW scheme](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>25</sup> Erika Sallander, [Neighbourhood watch in multiple family dwellings: a guide](#), 2012 [last accessed 9 April 2018]

The Neighbourhood Watch Register is a secure online register of coordinators and schemes across England and Wales. It is hosted by [Neighbourhood Alert](#), the official database for the Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network.

It is designed to allow information-sharing with certain licence-holding organisations. Entries are edited by both members and coordinators, who choose which of the licence-holding organisations are able to see these entries. The Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network holds a national licence, as does Action Fraud. According to the NHWN website, twenty police forces hold a licence for their area, as do some local authorities.<sup>26</sup>

It also provides an evidence base for the number of schemes in existence.

#### *Logo*

Neighbourhood Watch is a registered brand, and the logo is freely available to all members, to be used “with integrity”.<sup>27</sup>

A registered police force, and respective Police and Crime Commissioners, may use the logo in line with the wishes of the Force Area Association.<sup>28</sup>

The logo was updated in 2016.

The Neighbourhood  
Watch logo is a  
registered brand

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<sup>26</sup> NHWN, [The NHW Register](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>27</sup> NHWN, [Logo](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

## 4. Relationship with police

A good working relationship with the police is fundamental to the Neighbourhood Watch scheme. The NHWN website states that:

A strong relationship between Neighbourhood Watch and the police at local, force and national level is vital to reduce crime and keep people safe in their communities. We are committed to building and maintaining a positive partnership with the police.<sup>29</sup>

The Force Level Associations maintain the impetus of the movement at local level. The NHWN website explains that:

Although we refer to 'force level' Associations, they are run by Neighbourhood Watch volunteers - not by the police. The term 'force area' just refers to the same geographical area covered by the police force. It makes sense to have an Association for each force area because this allows for more effective working with the police and for our strategies to be aligned.<sup>30</sup>

The advice on setting up and maintaining a Neighbourhood Watch scheme states that "The closer the links with the police, the more effective a scheme will be." Anyone interested in setting up a scheme is recommended to contact the local policing team early in the process.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> NHWN, [Police](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>30</sup> NHWN, [Force Level Association](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>31</sup> NHWN, [Setting up a NHW scheme](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

## 5. Funding and support

### 5.1 Government

This Government, like previous Governments, does not fund individual Neighbourhood Watch schemes, although these may be able to obtain support from the Local Authority or Community Safety Partnership. A response by the then Home Office Minister Vernon Coaker to a Parliamentary Question from Bob Russell MP in March 2008 explained that:

The Neighbourhood Watch Movement has received no direct financial support from the Home Office in the past 10 years. Instead, the Home Office supports the Movement through provision of a dedicated liaison post, and by publishing materials and promotional literature for the Movement's use. Since 2004, the Home Office has chaired the National Strategy Group for Watch Issues, maintained a website and administered use of the Neighbourhood Watch logo. In 2005, the Home Office began funding annual public liability insurance for Movement members, and since 2007 has hosted quarterly national meetings of volunteers' representatives. The Home Office has committed to providing this range of support in 2008-09.<sup>32</sup>

NHWN, on its website, describes the support it receives from the Home Office as follows:

As a national charity, we are partly funded by the Home Office and we work with them on national crime issues such as Serious & Organised Crime and cybercrime. They are a vital partner helping us to link national strategy with local action.<sup>33</sup>

In 2015/16 the Home Office continued to provide funding: to support the central office and five members of staff as well as the Public Liability Insurance (PLI) cover for the members. This was with a grant of £275,000.<sup>34</sup>

### 5.2 Sponsors

The Co-op Insurance became a primary sponsor of Neighbourhood Watch in 2016, aiming to assist in setting up a large number of new schemes.<sup>35</sup>

Neighbourhood Watch is also sponsored by ERA Home Security.<sup>36</sup>

#### Fundraising

The NHWN website provides information about fundraising at local level. Essentially it gives advice on applying for funding and for other kinds of support and identifies possible sponsors and funders including charitable trusts.<sup>37</sup>

Individual neighbourhood watch schemes do not receive direct government funding.

The national organisation is partly funded by the Home Office

Force Associations and local schemes rely on sponsorship and fundraising

<sup>32</sup> [HC Deb 7 March 2008 c2840W](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>33</sup> NHWN, [Government](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>34</sup> Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network, [Report of the trustees together with the audited financial statements of the Charitable Company for the year ended 31 March 2016](#), 12 July 2016 [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>35</sup> NHWN, [Co-op Insurance Sponsorship](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>36</sup> NHWN, [Sponsors](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>37</sup> NHWN, [Fundraising](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

## 6. Public Liability Insurance

From 2004 the Home Office arranged for public liability insurance cover to be available, free of charge, to all Neighbourhood Watch groups that registered with their local police force. The insurance provided cover against accidental injury to any third party or damage to any third party's property which may occur in connection with "clearly defined Neighbourhood Watch community activities."<sup>38</sup>

From April 2012 the Home Office passed on responsibility for Public Liability Insurance to the NHWN. The NHWN has negotiated a public liability insurance policy, funded by the Home Office, which provides cover for neighbourhood and home watch volunteers. Details of the policy are available on the [NHWN website](#).<sup>39</sup>

The Home Office funds public liability insurance cover.

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<sup>38</sup> Home Office Departmental Minute, *Home Office Indemnity for Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in England and Wales*, 15 March 2011 (UC 36 2010-11)

<sup>39</sup> Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network, [Public Liability Insurance Certificate](#) [last accessed 9 April 2018]

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