

# Briefing Paper

## Neighbourhood Watch in Context

### A Strategic Tool for the Neighbourhood Policing Agenda

#### 1. Introduction

1.1 Neighbourhood Policing is the single most important development within the delivery of policing services in recent years. The Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) movement (including Home Watch and other similar schemes) is the single largest voluntary organisation in England and Wales, with a presence in many neighbourhoods across the country<sup>1</sup>, and up to six million members. Given this overlap, it is natural to seek synergies between Neighbourhood Policing and Neighbourhood Watch.

#### 2. Aims

2.1 There is considerable overlap in the aims of Neighbourhood Policing and the Neighbourhood Watch movement, particularly in respect of crime prevention, sharing intelligence, identifying issues of local concern, being involved in community problem solving, promoting social cohesion, building community capacity, public reassurance and confidence in local policing. These aims are set out more fully below.

#### 2.2 *Neighbourhood Policing*

2.2.1 The Neighbourhood Policing Program has three principles at its core:

- The consistent presence of dedicated Neighbourhood teams capable of working with the community to establish and maintain control – to be visible, accessible, skilled, knowledgeable and familiar to the community.
- Intelligence-led identification of community concerns – prompt, effective, targeted action against those concerns.
- Joint action and problem solving with the community and other local partners - to improve the local environment and quality of life within the community.

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<sup>1</sup> Findings from the 2000 British Crime Survey (Home Office/RDS (2001) Neighbourhood Watch: findings from the 2000 BCS) across England and Wales indicated that:

- An estimated 27% of households were members of a Neighbourhood Watch scheme in 2000.
- 75% of respondents to the survey thought that Neighbourhood Watch schemes were effective in preventing crimes such as burglary.
- For households that were not members, 78% said that they would join a scheme if there was one in the local area.

- 2.2.2 Underpinning these principles are the communities expectations to have;
- **Access** – to policing or community safety services through a named point of contact
  - **Influence** – over community safety priorities in their Neighbourhood
  - **Interventions** – joint action with communities and partners to solve problems
  - **Answers** – sustainable solutions to problems and feedback on results.

## **2.3 Neighbourhood Watch**

2.3.1 The Neighbourhood Watch Purpose Statement, ratified by the National Strategy Group for Watch Issues (NSGWI)<sup>2</sup>, in September 2006 states:

### **2.3.2 Neighbourhood Watch exists to:**

- Cut crime and the opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour
- Provide reassurance to local residents and reduce the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour
- Encourage neighbourliness and closer communities
- Improve the quality of life for local residents and tenants

### **2.3.3 It will do this by:**

- Being a community based organisation, involving residents and tenants who are working together
- Working in partnership with the police, local authorities and other agencies to reduce crime and disorder
- Sharing information and advice with the police and other agencies concerning crime and other incidents

### **2.3.4 It can do this by:**

- Identifying issues of local concern
- Becoming involved in community problem solving, agreeing regularly which problems to target and what actions to take
- Getting involved in crime and disorder and anti-social behaviour prevention initiatives
- Providing volunteer administrators/co-ordinators who assist paid Neighbourhood Watch staff to effectively run Neighbourhood Watch
- Monitoring and reporting on Anti-Social Behaviour
- Forming district, county/force-wide associations to share and disseminate good practice
- Linking into and working with other Watch movements and wider voluntary, public sector and private sector bodies

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<sup>2</sup> The National Strategy Group for Watch Issues is a national level Working Group, chaired by the Home Office, to oversee development of policy and good practice around Watch Issues. Members include representatives from the Neighbourhood Watch Movement, Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), Association of Police Authorities (APA), Local Government Association (LGA), Community Development Foundation (CDF), Crime Concern, Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), NACRO and TPAS.

### 2.3.5 **The Police Service supports Neighbourhood Watch by:**

- Having a clear policy statement which outlines its support for Neighbourhood Watch and the wider Watch movement
- Providing regular, structured help and guidance, especially to co-ordinators and district, county/force-wide Neighbourhood Watch associations
- Providing routine crime figures, other information and expert advice to Watch schemes
- Supporting the development of Watches or similar schemes into areas with the greatest need, including engaging with minority communities which are currently under-represented within the Watch movement
- Providing training opportunities for Watch co-ordinators
- Ensuring appropriate Neighbourhood Watch paid staff are trained to a minimum standard and managed effectively
- Developing a service level agreement between Neighbourhood Watch and the police
- Providing feedback to Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators/members who pass information/intelligence/incidents to the police
- Providing rapid dissemination of current information/intelligence to co-ordinators
- Integrating Neighbourhood Watch into its Neighbourhood Policing Programme
- Assisting local schemes to find sources of funding for running costs and other initiatives
- At a local level, bringing together Neighbourhood Watch work with other Watch, voluntary, public and private sector bodies concerned with crime, anti-social behaviour and quality of life issues
- Where agreed by the local force, carrying out vetting of Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators and other appropriate Neighbourhood Watch volunteers

2.4 Neighbourhood Watch members have worked with the Police Service since 1982 in a number of ways. Much of the work has focused on improving home security, passing intelligence to the police and reducing the fear of crime. Other schemes have been involved in more proactive enterprises based around building community cohesion, diverting young offenders and providing volunteers to assist police with administrative tasks.

2.5 However, wider proactive work has been the exception rather than the norm, not least because of limited visible and accessible police leadership in communities. Whilst not all Neighbourhood Watch members would wish to be more actively involved with the police service, the roll out of Neighbourhood Policing gives an ideal opportunity to tap into the unused energy and enthusiasm of the many who would wish to act in this way. Neighbourhood Watch members are natural supporters of Neighbourhood Policing and, with the right support and encouragement, offer a key and largely untapped resource to be utilised by Neighbourhood Policing Teams.

2.6 This would also meet the commitment made by the Police service, in the above Purpose Statement of;  
**“Integrating Neighbourhood Watch into its Neighbourhood Policing Programme”**

### **3. How Can Neighbourhood Watch Help?**

#### ***Information, Crime Prevention and Reassurance***

- 3.1.1 The Neighbourhood Watch movement has a long history of working with the Police Service in England and Wales. However, it is recognised that the ease of establishing Neighbourhood Watch schemes will vary across the country and is more difficult in high crime areas and some areas containing high ethnic minority communities.
- 3.1.2 Much of this involvement has focused on working with local community officers and specialist Crime Prevention Officers to promote home security, a sense of ownership and guardianship within Neighbourhood Watch areas and the collection of intelligence/reporting of suspicious incidents to the police.
- 3.1.3 There are many examples across the country where this type of activity assisted in the arrest of the offenders and the reduction of crime, as well as promoting a feeling of safety within communities involved in Neighbourhood Watch<sup>3</sup>.
- 3.1.4 Poor communication between the Police and Neighbourhood Watch schemes has been the biggest issue reported by scheme members over many years. As a minimum, Neighbourhood Policing offers good opportunities to improve upon these communications issues, improving the two way flow of information between the Police and Watch members.
- 3.1.5 There are an increasing range of cheap, effective, easy to use and modern communication methods to assist this communication process. These include Online Watch Liaison (OWL) (Hertfordshire), AlertComms (MPS) and Voice Connect (Cumbria). These methods can supplement more traditional methods of communication such as RingMaster, leaflets or newsletters. Many of these methods not only deliver automated messages to Watch Scheme members through a variety of media (phone, text, email, fax) but will also receive replies (eg useful in recruiting volunteers to assist in emergency situations).
- 3.1.6 Watch scheme co-ordinators need to be seen as part of Key Individual Networks (KIN's) for Neighbourhood Policing teams, with a regular schedule of contacts being maintained to improve information flows.

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<sup>3</sup> A recently published systematic review of NW schemes (Journal of Experimental Criminology (2006) “Does NW reduce crime? A systematic review”) in the UK and USA found that about half of the schemes evaluated showed the NW was effective in reducing crime. The authors suggest that NW has other positive outcomes including increased surveillance, a reduction in the opportunities for crime and social/ community benefits.

## **3.2 Developing Arrangements for Community Engagement & Problem Solving**

- 3.2.1 Neighbourhood Policing offers opportunities to move beyond these traditional areas of inter-action, to involve Neighbourhood Watch members in Community Engagement processes. NHW volunteers have a wide and varied range of skills and experience that could add great value to community engagement and these should be developed to their full potential.
- 3.2.2 Different community engagement and consultation mechanisms require different levels of community participation. When considering how to involve communities, it is important to think about the role of that involvement and the promises the Police Service will be making to those communities. This involvement can vary from information provision / communication to community empowerment and community-led problem solving.
- 3.2.3 There are a number of principle engagement methods and techniques that can be applied, each tailored for use in any given locality, ward or beat.
- 3.2.4 These tools and techniques include:
- Meetings – Formal locality based ‘panels’
  - Surgeries – Informal meetings or other meetings with a Neighbourhood Policing agenda item i.e., School PTA or parish council meetings.
  - Environmental Action Day’s (EAD’s) - Multi agency ‘clean sweeps’ of neighbourhoods
  - Environmental Visual Audits (EVA’s) – Multi agency physical surveys to inform local improvements and problem solving
  - Post cards - simple consultation leaflets
  - Street meets or briefings – face to face street level engagement
  - Telephone, postal or online surveys or surveys administered during door knocking
  - Interactive planning events or open forums
  - Police arranged meetings, focus groups, workshops, citizen juries or interviews
- 3.2.5 All of these tools and techniques are available for community engagement purposes. However, the desired level of community participation will depend on the particular locality, levels of tension and cohesion within communities, the volume of crime and levels of worry or fear about crime that exists. Neighbourhood Watch offers one conduit through which all these tools can be used for community engagement, whilst accepting that Neighbourhood Watch may not be either the only or the best method for community engagement in all locations. However, where Neighbourhood Watch is strongly represented in the community, it should be considered for inclusion as part of any community engagement strategy.
- 3.2.6 For example, in some circumstances it may be appropriate for NHW to take on a lead role in respect of organising the local meetings, surgeries and Street Meetings. This would be influenced by the skills and abilities of the NHW watch

volunteer and the wishes of the partners involved in the engagement methods in a specific locality. Alternatively, Neighbourhood Watch members could take on a supporting role in respect of Environmental Visual Audits and local surveying by CDRPs.

- 3.2.7 In this latter respect, NHW can and should act as a means of mobilising large numbers of volunteers for a wide range of activities from the more traditionally reactive role, extending into new areas of community action and consultation shown above. For example, recent years have seen the development of NHW schemes as an integral part of the response to civil emergencies, such as flooding.
- 3.2.8 Following guidance issued by the National Centre for Policing Excellence (NCPE) now NPIA, surrounding Neighbourhood Policing and National Intelligence Model (NIM), it is suggested that NHW Watch Liaison Officers (ie paid members of staff responsible for the administration of Neighbourhood Watch at local levels) could become a standing member of Partnership Tasking and Co-ordination meetings. Such a formal link will ensure that NHW is represented and is tasked as a Neighbourhood Policing asset in line with the NIM.

### **3.3 Alignment of NHW Structure and NHP Model**


- 3.3.1 Whilst arrangements for Neighbourhood Watch differ around the country, many Forces now have representative structures for Neighbourhood Watch at a variety of different levels (eg Force, BCU, CDRP, Neighbourhood, Street). Given this variety, no exact model can be laid down for the alignment of Neighbourhood Watch and Neighbourhood Policing across the country. However, it is possible to consider an idealised structure as set out in Annex A. This provides a useful template that Forces could work from, varying the actual structure to suit local circumstances.
- 3.3.2 The structure also depicts the close links that have developed at national level between the Home Office chaired National Strategy Group for Watch Issues and the NPIA managed National Neighbourhood Policing Programme.
- 3.3.3 This structure could strengthen the relationships between the Neighbourhood policing Teams, the National Intelligence Model and NHW. It also ensures NHW have a direct involvement in local engagement, consultation and priority setting and provides a direct link to partnership Tasking and Co-ordination meetings where resources can be allocated to problems that are beyond the scope of locality policing teams acting alone.
- 3.3.4 Clearly, the most important links between Neighbourhood Policing and Neighbourhood Watch are at the lowest levels of this structure. How far up the structure Neighbourhood Watch is involved in Tasking & Co-ordinating processes is very much a matter for local Forces.

### **3.4 Case Studies**

3.4.1 Attached at Annex B is a small sample of the many case studies available which show how in practice Neighbourhood Watch and Neighbourhood Policing Teams are already working together to achieve their joint aims. These case studies illustrate many of the points in the paragraphs above.

### **4. Conclusions**

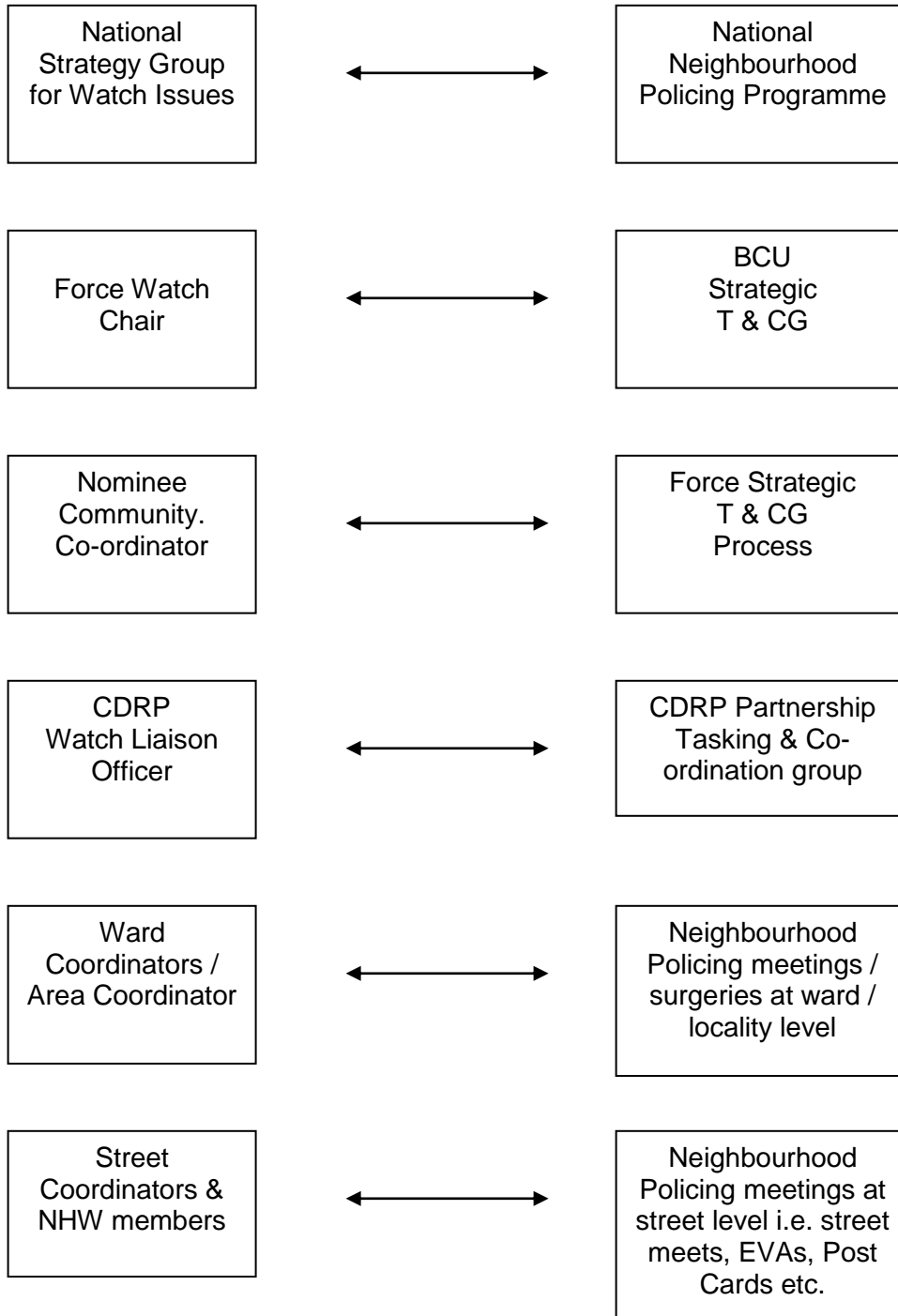
4.1 NHW has the potential to provide a ready made structure with capacity and capability to develop the local consultation, engagement and problem solving required to deliver not only crime prevention but public reassurance. If configured with existing structures, as described in this paper, NHW will enhance Neighbourhood Policing. It can provide real opportunities to enhance Access, Influence, Interventions and Answers as articulated in the guidance issued by the NCPE 'Professionalising the Business of Neighbourhood Policing'.



Frank Whiteley  
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## Annex A

### A Possible Alignment of Neighbourhood Watch Structure and Neighbourhood Policing Model



## **Annex B**

### **Case Studies involving Neighbourhood Watch and Neighbourhood Policing Teams**

#### **Stockton, Cleveland**

A known drug dealer was re-housed on a local estate and within 24 hours of him moving in, clients were seen to be coming and going all night. Neighbourhood Policing Teams had a meeting with the local Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordination Team in the area and diary logs were kept on vehicle registrations and descriptions of persons entering the property. This went on for six weeks with the Co-Ordination Team supplying the intelligence to local Neighbourhood Policing Teams. As a result, the drug dealer was moved out of the property and re-housed in another District.

#### **Stockton, Cleveland**

Residents started a NHW Scheme on an estate that was plagued by groups of drunken youths and although not the best solution for every estate this one worked really well. With the support of the Neighbourhood Policing Team and local housing association that owned the estate, Newsletters were sent out every month to all residents to keep them informed on what was going on within their estate (350 Properties). Most were elderly residents and because of the groups of youths and other associated crime on the estate none of the residents would venture out from their property's after 17:00.

It was decided by the NHW group that some of the members should walk around the estate during dark hours but it was done in pairs and it was not a vigilante group. Their role was to observe and report any crime and to give reassurance to the residents. This took a few months of NHW members going out every night and with the help of the Neighbourhood Policing Team eventually the groups of youths moved away from the area and other associated crime also disappeared from the estate. With the help of other agencies the estate was cleaned up, graffiti removed street lighting repaired, and a regular street cleaning program set up by the local council.

On the whole this was a major achievement. The housing association that owned the properties now had for the first time in five years a waiting list of people that wanted to move on the estate, they always had a list of people wanting to move off before. Local Policing teams reported an 85% Decrease in crime on that estate.

#### **Wirral, Merseyside**

One Neighbourhood Watch group on the Woodchurch Estate has a particularly active Neighbourhood Watch Co-Ordinator. Initially she was the Neighbourhood watch leader for her immediate neighbours. She has now expanded to cover 56 houses and 33 council garages in the locality.

She has made up crime prevention packs, which include "a message in a bottle" which she has delivered to all the elderly residents in her area. There has been

positive feedback from members who feel they have someone to turn to in what was originally an isolated area.

She identifies issues of local concern so that we can provide a prompt and effective response. She assisted the Neighbourhood Policing Team in gathering intelligence on a family in her road that were the main cause of anti-social behaviour. The Neighbourhood Policing Team worked with Wirral Partnership Homes, Tranmere Alliance, Education and Social services in an effort to deal with the issues. This road was highlighted at a previous Tasking and Co-ordinating meeting as having more than 50% of our anti-social behaviour calls. The community problem solving, multi-agency approach has reduced these calls to NIL, reducing the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour to residents.

On 31/10/07 (Halloween) she visited each of the residents ensuring they were not having any issues, offering public reassurance and providing personal contact details to them. She ensured that all residents have the current contact details of the Neighbourhood Team, so that we are accessible and familiar faces in the community. Where necessary, she gave advice regarding crime prevention. This night, which historically receives high call levels relating to antisocial behaviour, amazingly showed that on those beats there were NO SUCH CALLS. This has improved the quality of life for local residents and tenants.

She provides fortnightly written reports on her area and speaks to at least one of the Neighbourhood Policing Team members on a weekly basis. She delivers key messages to all residents of information we want to share and as such another local resident has offered to assist. She is a firm believer in Neighbourhood Policing, she not only assists to strengthen this but feedback from elderly residents shows that they feel they have got their community spirit back.

### **Cumbria, Rural Communities (Smartwater & Trespass Projects)**

Historically, Neighbourhood Watch in Cumbria was perceived to be an urban and domestic initiative, of little relevance to the farming community. In 2004 membership amongst the farming community was very low (under 200) and crime spiraling – 111 quad bikes were stolen in that year, a 184% increase in three years since 2001.

In 2005/6, Cumbria Neighbourhood Watch Association secured £30,000 from a variety of sources to obtain 2,000 Smartwater kits, for distribution amongst the farming community, to protect their property. This product was, and is, provided free to the farmer provided they sign up to 'Farmwatch'.

Membership ensures that the crime prevention message is put across and appropriate steps taken to protect property. It also links the farming community to the Voice Connect system, enabling the police to quickly distribute intelligence to this community about criminal activity. The project is managed by NHW Development Officers, and supported by volunteers and some police staff.

Membership of Farmwatch has more than quadrupled since the introduction of this scheme to a current total of 901. This has increased the amount of intelligence being received by police intelligence units, and highlighted a common concern of farmers about 'trespassers' who are scouting for illegal purposes.

To tackle this problem, and in support of the Smartwater project, Cumbria Neighbourhood Watch, in partnership with Cumbria Constabulary, has introduced a 'Trespass scheme'. This entails members signing a letter authorising Cumbria Neighbourhood Watch to send a letter to targeted individuals (identified by the police as having criminal convictions, or actively engaged in rural crime), instructing them that they are not welcome at participating premises, and that breaching the instruction may lead to civil or criminal action. The recipient is then given a list of those participating premises. Since introduction of these schemes, quad bike theft in Cumbria has reduced by 35%.

### **Larkfield, Kent**

The key to the successful running of NHW in Larkfield is a strong area-coordinator and regular contact between all the coordinators. The area-coordinator maintains close contact with the Neighbourhood Policing Team and the Police NHW liaison officer. He then sets up the various roads (which is done door to door personally rather than blanket letters to a particular road), and selects suitable street coordinators. There is then regular contact between the area and street coordinators. If it is felt that a coordinator is not maintaining an orderly active NHW scheme, the area-coordinator then intervenes. Local coordinators are also encouraged to communicate with each other. The main thing is keeping everyone in touch and updated, so all the Larkfield NHW act as one and are aware they are part of a bigger scheme, thereby preventing streets being isolated and withering on the vine.

A local officer from the Neighbourhood Policing Team is the first point of contact for the area coordinator and street coordinators. The Officer, together with a PCSO from the Team, regularly attend NHW meetings, and have contact numbers for the coordinators. This has proved useful in a recent Environmental Visual Audit (EVA) (walkabout) involving parish and borough councillors and various highways, lighting and housing officers. Prior to the EVA the local officer contacted the relevant coordinators for the roads being visited. They were then able to consult with their members and attend the EVA to put across the general concerns in the road.

By keeping close contact with the area coordinator, the local police officer is able to ensure things are running smoothly and in line with policing objectives. The Area Co-Ordinator and the Local Officer regularly discuss NHW, and the direction we want it to go in Larkfield.

## Highdown, Sussex – Neighbourhood Watch Search Team



### NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH SEARCH TEAM

**150 VOLUNTEERS -  
WAITING TO HELP  
YOU**

The Neighbourhood  
Watch Search Team

are all NHW members who are willing to be called out to assist the police in searching for missing persons or articles. This is a 24 / 7 commitment subject to personal availability.



**Callout of the NHWST must be in accordance with Force Policy 561 / 2003**

ie. with the consent of GOLD and at the request of the Police Search Advisor.

NHWST members have received training in search techniques, search management, scene preservation and first aid.

The teams will also have access to their own radio / mobile phone communication system.

**All searches by the West Downs NHWST must be conducted under the supervision of the Police Search Advisor**

## **Oxmoor and Hartford, Cambridgeshire – Problem Solving/Enforcement Initiative**

A recent initiative by the Oxmoor and Hartford Neighbourhood Policing Team within the Central BCU saw them working with several partners e.g. bailiffs enforcement teams, Trading Standards, Vehicle and Operator Services Agency and Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency to make a difference locally. Key feedback from engagement, including with Neighbourhood Watch and the local Neighbourhood Panel meeting had told them that positive focused action was needed locally. This is an excellent example of empowered communities working with enforcement agencies.

Tackling outstanding compensation owed to victims and fines through enforcement warrants and removal of untaxed vehicles sends out a strong message and is seen as part of the cultural change that strong neighbourhood partnership and joint enforcement activity can deliver.

Information provided by Neighbourhood Watch Schemes, about untaxed vehicles, was acted upon during this initiative.

At the Forces NHW Conference Vernon Coaker MP and Under Secretary of State for Policing was keen to hear of this particular initiative, and made a reference to it in his speech as an excellent example of powerful local partnership working. The following results were obtained during the initiative:

- 17 Vehicles were clamped by the DVLA for not having documents including road tax, a further 15 foreign vehicles were reported for not being registered in the UK.
- Some 40 people with outstanding non-payment of fines were targeted, 22 people were taken to court for unpaid fines, five more people coming forward to voluntarily get their debts sorted out. More than £15,000 was owed in fines ranging from non-payment of parking charges to assault.
- 22 vehicles were banned from the road for various faults including defective tyres. Police were concerned because this represented almost a quarter of the 100 vehicles stopped during the initiative, a further 26 trade vehicles were stopped and found to have minor faults.

### **Bedfordshire, Neighbourhood Watch in High Crime Areas**

Covert Neighbourhood Watch Schemes – Established in areas where members fear reprisals. NHW liaison officers arrange meetings at neutral locations if desired and bring right agencies together. There is no overt signage. Processes are established for information to be gathered and handed to relevant agencies and agencies agree to share information. Residents supply information by completing log books. Increased agency activity in the area will increase confidence in residents managing own environment, ultimately residents control their own area.