

Cheshire Neighbourhood Watch Association

AGM Wednesday 7th November 2018

Chair's Report

1. Introduction

Good evening everyone and welcome to this inaugural meeting of the Cheshire Neighbourhood Watch Association. Today I'd like to update you on the progress that the Association has made since its formation in April 2016.

As we are all aware, the nature of crime is changing and now encompasses new threats to public safety such as identity theft, cybercrime, child sexual exploitation, modern slavery, and hate crime. One of the best ways we can keep our homes and communities safe is to help, advise and support each other.

The Cheshire Neighbourhood Watch Association comprises local groups of householders, facilitated by a volunteer co-ordinator; these are known as **Local Neighbourhood Watch Schemes**.

These groups are bound together by a common interest in community safety and security. They work in partnership with the police and other community safety organisations to report and receive information, acting as local eyes and ears in our communities.

The common interest in safety also helps to foster a better community spirit within the local communities in Cheshire.

2. Role of the Committee

Until 2016 the Cheshire Homewatch Scheme was coordinated Clare Harrison's predecessor, Liz Biddle, from Cheshire Police, and following a re-invigoration of the National Neighbourhood Watch organisation, separate Force Area Associations were formed. Liz, in her own inimitable style, managed to cajole several of us into forming the Steering Group for the new Cheshire Neighbourhood Watch Association, and we set about the task of establishing the Association.

The purpose of the Association is to work in partnership with the Cheshire Police to promote and develop effective Neighbourhood Watch Schemes across Cheshire.

More specifically, the role of the Association is to provide guidance to local Neighbourhood Watch Schemes, ensuring that they conform to best practice; and to liaise with Cheshire Police, the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner, and other agencies.

Compared with the previous Homewatch, we now have a more formalised structure in place supported by written agreements with partner agencies.

Since mid 2016, the Committee has:

- Defined the aims of the Cheshire Association
- Agreed a Constitution
- Agreed a Partnership Agreement with Cheshire Police
- Drafted a Partnership Agreement for the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office

- Agreed a Partnership Agreement with the National Association

This all sounds a bit bureaucratic but it has to be done so that everyone is clear about their roles and responsibilities. I won't go into all the details of the agreements otherwise we'll be here all night so I'll just touch on a few headlines:

2.1 Cheshire Association Aims

The main aims of the Cheshire Association are to:

- Partner with the police and other community safety agencies to prevent crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour in our communities, by encouraging communication between the police, co-ordinators and household members.
- Increase awareness in our communities about all crime, including new crime threats. For example things such as cybercrime, identity theft, child sexual exploitation, modern day slavery, hate crime, etc.
- Encourage all residents to take personal responsibility for their own safety and that of others, reporting information to the police and other safety agencies and to give special consideration to those who may be vulnerable.
- Foster community spirit between the diverse communities in Cheshire.

2.2 Constitution

Briefly, the Constitution sets out the composition of the Association, of which an important element is that CNWA Members are organised into four geographic Neighbourhood Watch Association Groups, currently aligned with local authority areas. Each Association Group will elect up to a maximum of two Association Members, who reside within their group geographic area, to become Association Committee Members. I'll say more about this process later.

Other key elements of the Constitution are the terms of reference of the Association, financial arrangements, and frequency of meetings. It's one of those documents that is done once and then reviewed every few years.

2.3 Partnership Agreements

The real working documents are the Partnership agreements and I'm pleased to say that we have agreed the Cheshire Police Partnership, which is ready for signature.

Police support is vital to our work and Cheshire Police will:

- Nominate a strategic lead to have responsibility for supporting the development and implementation of Neighbourhood Watch across Cheshire.
- Provide a single point of contact (SPOC) to liaise with the CNWA and the national Neighbourhood Watch network.

- Ensure that Neighbourhood Police Teams forge and maintain links with NW Schemes and support the CNWA to promote Neighbourhood Watch and recruit new members.

Our agreement with the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office is still work in progress and we hope to have it signed within the next few months.

2.4 The National Organisation Neighbourhood Watch Network (NWN)

The National organisation is an incorporated, charitable organisation, with a board of trustees, elected by Force Level Neighbourhood Watch Association representatives. The NWN operates from a central office in London, and is part funded by the Home Office. A member of our organisation represents Cheshire NWA at National NWN meetings.

Following a strategic review in consultation with Force Associations, the National Organisation has formulated a 3 year strategy, the key aims of which are:

- 1. Provide a great service to Neighbourhood Watch members** – by supporting and developing existing schemes.
- 2. Grow the charity** – by attracting new members and schemes and engaging them in Neighbourhood Watch campaigns.
- 3. Extend the reach** – by developing ways of promoting Neighbourhood Watch in areas of high crime, deprivation or need.

As part of the first aim, they have recently published a set of 6 working documents on the emerging crimes that I've already mentioned, for Force Level associations to refer to, as well as documents which give practical support and guidance for Local Neighbourhood Watch schemes.

The new National Team is still in the process of formation, but I do sense a high degree of keenness to engage with and support us.

3. Current Work and Priorities

So that's the ways of working and partnerships that we have in place. I now want to turn to the day to day work of the team and the Committee's priorities.

3.1 Elections for Committee – volunteers

In future, we will have an Association Committee, with eight representatives elected from the four local council areas in Cheshire (Cheshire East, Cheshire West & Chester, Warrington, and Halton).

We have carried out an initial call for volunteers to stand for election, but no-one has yet stepped forward to join the Committee. It's always difficult to get people to do voluntary work and this is no different. Nevertheless, we do have things to do to support the Local Neighbourhood Watch Coordinators, so rather than ask people to join the committee full-time, we are actively seeking volunteers to help with specific projects and tasks that would only take a few hours per month. If anyone here would like to offer their services, please let us know!

3.2 Verification of coordinators

One of the ongoing pieces of work is to ensure that we have up-to-date records of coordinators. At 1st November we had 1,510 registered coordinators, and 614 mapped schemes. We actively seeking another volunteer to liaise with new coordinators.

1,510 may sound like a large number but this is fewer than 1% of households, so there is much room for improvement. Uptake of Neighbourhood Watch in the Runcorn and Widnes LPU is especially low.

3.3 Website

We have our own website (<http://cheshire.ourwatch.org.uk>) which has information about the Cheshire Association, details of all documentation, alerts and key links.

3.4 Communications

We have a rolling communication plan in place and Heather Thompson has recently joined us as Communication Administrator. We will be increasing the frequency and relevance of communications with Coordinators, to provide better and more focussed support.

We will also hold committee meetings in each of the 4 community areas (CWaC, CEC, Warrington, and Halton) so that coordinators and members can attend.

Parish Councils have always been big supporters of Neighbourhood Watch and we will be promoting the Association through the Parish Council network in order to increase membership.

And Finally

With the organisation established and ways of working agreed, or in the process of being agreed, together with the support of a re-invigorated National organisation, I feel confident that we can grow Neighbourhood Watch in Cheshire and improve the support to coordinators.

None of this would have been possible without the people involved. I'd particularly like to thank my fellow committee members for their hard work, dedication, support, and camaraderie over the past two years.

Also a big thanks to Clare Harrison, our Police SPOC, who keeps us organised, and to Superintendent Peter Crowcroft for his support and work in promoting Neighbourhood Watch amongst the PCSO community.

And of course thank you to everyone who has taken the time and trouble to join us here tonight. If any of you have any questions, please raise them now or privately with any of the committee.