

NottsWatch Conference & Annual General Meeting

Saturday, 13 May 2017

AGM - Chair's Annual Report

Introduction

I am very pleased to present to you my Annual Report as Chair of Nottinghamshire Neighbourhood Watch (aka NottsWatch), and would like to begin by thanking all my colleagues on the Executive Committee (that is, the NottsWatch Trustees) & the Members of the Management Board for all their hard work, enthusiasm and support over the past 12 months. Without their efforts and dedication to the Neighbourhood Watch movement, the organisation would not have been able to operate as effectively as it has. Regular attendees at Management Board Meetings are: -

Paul Macey, Trustee & Deputy Chair (Newark & Sherwood)

Sue Sambells, Trustee & Secretary (Broxtowe)

David Rhodes, Trustee & Treasurer (City)

John Lennard, Trustee & Webmaster (Rushcliffe)

Sam Boote, Trustee (Rushcliffe)

George Collins, Trustee (Newark & Sherwood)

David Poole, Trustee (City)

Mary Penford MBE, (Mansfield)

Yvette Armstrong, Nottinghamshire County Council

Chris Thompson, Nottinghamshire Police Partnership Office

From time to time, the Board has also welcomed guests from appropriate organisations to attend specific meetings, to progress specific issues, as and when required.

Overview of Changes & Challenges

One of the most significant changes in recent times has been the way people communicate with each other. In the mid nineteen-eighties, a Neighbourhood Watch scheme very often formed the hub of the local community, encouraging "good neighborliness" and community

cohesion, and many people were willing to volunteer their services to ensure the local scheme's continued success. The Police were always available to lend a hand, and indeed it was almost impossible to form and manage a NHW scheme without their authority and support.

However, with the widespread use of social media to "stay in touch", together with the drastic reduction in personnel within Police Neighbourhood Beat Teams, in many areas this is no longer the case, and this can lead to apathy towards NHW and a reduction in the number of people willing to help or even get involved. Consequently, as I see it, this gives the NHW movement its biggest challenges – how do we reconnect with local communities that have lost their NHW presence, and how do we promote the formation of schemes within areas that have never been involved?

Of course, NHW schemes continue to thrive in some areas, and those people responsible for their success are to be heartily congratulated for their persistence and hard work. But we at NottsWatch believe that, instead of ignoring the modern world and all its changing resources, the NHW movement needs to adapt and harness those same resources to achieve a revitalized organisation.

As the theme of our Conference infers, the face of crime appears to be rapidly changing – moving away from "traditional activities" such as burglary and car theft (although recent figures suggest these activities are still thriving), and rapidly increasing into cybercrime, telephone scams and other modern methods of stealing hard-earned cash from the public. The only way we shall achieve success is to work ever closer with our major Partners, to keep our members better protected against these relatively new and seemingly ever-changing threats.

Service Level Agreement (NottsWatch & Police)

Some months ago, NottsWatch and Nottinghamshire Police signed a Service Level Agreement (available to download from the NottsWatch [website](#)), which describes and cements the principles and practicalities of the close working relationship between the two organisations, as we face our joint challenges moving forward.

The SLA also confirms that NottsWatch is recognised by the Police as the appropriate organisation to represent Neighbourhood Watch within the City of Nottingham and the County of Nottinghamshire. This is a very powerful document, and I believe it will form the basis of several new joint initiatives as we strive to combat crime.

Memorandum of Understanding (NottsWatch & County Council)

Also during 2016, NottsWatch and Nottinghamshire County Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding (again, available from the NottsWatch [website](#)) that defines the specific arrangements for future joint co-operation, and confirms the commitment of both parties to continue to work in partnership, to ensure the strategic development of NHW throughout the County of Nottinghamshire. This, too, is a ground-breaking development, and is a clear indication of the close two-way support that will be provided by the County's Community Safety Partnerships and the Neighbourhood Watch movement working in tandem.

Development of NottsWatch Policies

During the latter part of 2016, thanks mainly to some excellent work by David Rhodes and Yvette Armstrong, NottsWatch developed a set of important formal policies in accordance with the stringent requirements of the Charity Commission. The collection of policies (produced as one document for ease of reference) can be downloaded from the NottsWatch [website](#), and covers the following topics: -

1. Managing Volunteers, Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults
2. Paying staff
3. Risk management
4. Governance
5. Data protection
6. Investment
7. Equal Opportunities
8. Health and Safety
9. Conflict of interest

10. Handling complaints

Anyone involved in running a Neighbourhood Watch scheme is advised to obtain a copy of the NottsWatch policies document, as a source of information regarding required standards and good practice. This is complemented by the Code of Ethics document, as issued by the national Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network, which can be downloaded from their “ourwatch” [website](#).

New NHW Schemes in the County

Once again, a major objective throughout the past 12 months has been to deliver the project funded by Nottinghamshire County Council, whereby the members of the Management Board have been encouraging and supporting the formation of new NHW schemes within each of the seven County Districts, namely Bassetlaw, Mansfield, Ashfield, Newark & Sherwood, Gedling, Broxtowe & Rushcliffe. We are pleased to report that so far, we have been able to assist with the formation of 28 new NHW schemes, with at least a further 10 prospective schemes in the pipeline.

Nottingham City & Neighbourhood Watch

Although NottsWatch has been able to make significant strides to broaden the presence of Neighbourhood Watch throughout the County, so far this has not been the case within the City boundaries. The support & assistance given to us by Nottinghamshire County Council has been a significant factor in allowing us to achieve success throughout the County, and we are currently seeking ways of gaining involvement and spreading a positive Neighbourhood Watch message within the various “community-based committees” within the City Boundaries. This important initiative is being led by David Poole, who is already making progress by helping to promote a Neighbourhood Watch presence within some representative committees. He is being supported by Paul Macey, who has an excellent track record of setting up new schemes. The further development of Neighbourhood Watch within the City of Nottingham has formed a significant part of the NottsWatch Development Plan as presented to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. Fortunately, we have also received a very welcome offer of assistance from Chief Inspector Mark Stanley of Nottinghamshire Police, who has the current responsibility of policing Nottingham city centre.

Neighbourhood Watch Database

As a precursor to the City initiative, NottsWatch tried to determine the breadth of current NHW membership within the City boundaries, by attempting to check the accuracy of the information held on the central database.

We concluded that, whilst the design of the database is robust, the information it contains must be seriously questioned. Since the Police no longer “manage and control” the registration of Neighbourhood Watch schemes, for several years the system has been almost self-regulatory in many areas. Furthermore, the whole structure of Neighbourhood Watch representation is constantly changing, thereby producing a very fluid substructure. That is, many schemes are heavily dependent upon the energy and motivation of a small number of individuals, but when such an individual retires, leaves the area or perhaps expires, the NHW scheme may well become defunct and (by default) the information contained on the database is immediately inaccurate.

NottsWatch is aware this is a problem shared by many other Force Area Associations, and without the considerable resources to check and cross-check the accuracy of information, it is difficult to see a way forward. It is essential for any database to contain information that can be verified at any one time – otherwise there is no point in its existence. We look to the national Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network for some inspirational guidance on how to resolve this issue.

Developments at National Level

The Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network has itself undergone significant change that will impact on the Force Area Associations, of which NottsWatch is one.

The NHWN, which is now based at Wigston Police Station, Leicester, has developed and released a refreshed NHW logo, which can now be utilized by registered local NHW schemes (for example, in leaflets, correspondence etc.).

In future, Force Area Associations will also be able to influence policy making at national level, because the “Regional Representative” level has been removed. This means that each Force Area Association will have a say in decisions that will affect them, by being directly involved in relevant discussions and eventual voting procedures.

The NHWN is also finalizing a template for a Partnership Agreement that will be applicable to them and each Force Area Association. NottsWatch welcomes this approach, because such an Agreement cements the mutual support and relationship between the two organisations. However, the only element within the latest draft document we have taken exception to is a proposed commitment by the Force Area Association to *“Ensure the effective management, promotion and maintenance of up-to-date Neighbourhood Watch Scheme and Coordinator data on the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme Register.”* As explained, we have no confidence in the notion that the current information available on the database is accurate, nor have we the resources to constantly monitor and cross-check this information. Consequently, we fail to see how NottsWatch can **“ensure”** such data is accurate. Our position has been confirmed to the NHWN Management, and we await their response.

Development of “Safer Communities Forums”

One of the major concerns of some NHW scheme coordinators is the apparent lack of “connection” between the Police and the Neighbourhood Watch movement, which could result in a possible breakdown of communication between the two parties.

Conscious of this concern, Nottinghamshire Police (under the guidance of the Communications Department) and NottsWatch are currently working on a proposal to develop a series of communication hubs in each of the seven County Districts (and eventually the City areas), based upon the agreed working relationships specified in the Service Level Agreement.

The plan is that Nottinghamshire Police and local community representatives will meet on a regular basis (say every three months at least) to discuss local concerns, and to formulate policies and procedures, to better protect local communities within each specified area. Each of the proposed hubs will operate under the suggested banner of “Safer Community Forum”, and a successful prototype has been set up in Broxtowe by Sue Sambells, who has developed a website setting out the aims and progress of the initiative, which can be located on www.sbscf.wordpress.com .

NottsWatch Funding 2016-17

As previously reported, Nottinghamshire County Council provided NottsWatch with a generous financial grant to help encourage the formation of new NHW schemes within the 7 Districts of the County. Basic funding of new schemes (for such things as street signage, members' handbooks etc.) has been made available, and the arrangements have proved to be successful in several Districts (though not all). The NottsWatch Management Board will continue to maintain this as a major objective throughout 2017 and beyond.

In 2016, NottsWatch was also a recipient of a grant from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, principally for the funding of a Community Safety Initiative project. Initial indications are that a further grant from the PCC will be forthcoming in 2017.

Naturally, Nottinghamshire Neighbourhood Watch is extremely grateful for the financial support and enthusiastic encouragement it receives from its major partners, and, as part of the contractual obligations, will continue to strive to deliver its intended objectives.

Future Changes

Needless to say, there are always imminent changes to report to the membership, and this year is no exception: -

- Chris Thompson, Nottinghamshire Police Partnerships Officer and an ever-present Member of the NottsWatch Management Board, is to retire from the Force at the end of May 2017, and will therefore relinquish his position on the Board. Chris has been a stalwart of the organisation, providing a vital and uber-efficient contact between the Police and NottsWatch, and as such will be greatly missed. Chris has two daughters, and we understand they are both about to provide him with grandchildren. We wish them all well, and hope he has enough money to cover Christmas!!!
- Dr. David Rhodes, together with Alan Booth, was a driving force behind the successful amalgamation of the City of Nottingham Neighbourhood Watch Council and the Nottinghamshire Neighbourhood Watch Association on 22nd February 2014. Consequently, he became the first Chair of the newly formed Nottinghamshire Neighbourhood Watch, and subsequently took on the role of Honorary Treasurer during

2015-16 and 2016-17. David is moving away from Nottingham, and therefore will relinquish his positions as Trustee of NottsWatch and Member of the Management Board.

- Thirdly, for personal reasons I have decided not to put myself forward for re-election as Chair of NottsWatch, and indeed will retire from my position as Trustee and Member of the Management Board as of today. I have enjoyed my time as a Member and subsequently Chair of the organisation, but have concluded it is time for me to step aside to allow a fresh set of brain cells to be applied to the new tasks ahead. My colleagues on the Executive Committee and Management Board have been made well-aware of my intentions, and I am pleased to say that at least one extremely qualified colleague has come forward as a candidate for election as replacement Chair – so that at least I can sleep at night!!!

Recruitment Requirements

Finally, the imminent changes to the NottsWatch structure I have announced will mean that our very limited resources will inevitably become even more stretched without an injection of “new talent” into our management body. Without new ideas, energy and impetus, any organisation runs the risk of stagnation and eventual demise. NottsWatch is no different, and is certainly not protected by a “magic cloak of invulnerability”.

Consequently, if you feel you have the necessary skills (by, for instance, successfully running a NHW scheme), or perhaps have some experience in another appropriate sphere of organizational management or IT development, please get in touch (via the NottsWatch website or email address). We are also happy to have contributions at Management Board Meetings from established NHW Association leads as guests from time to time – without the need to commit to sitting on the Board as a full Member.

You can be assured you will receive a very warm welcome, you will certainly enjoy your involvement and make some long-lasting friendships. I urge you to give it a try.