

# NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

## GETTING INVOLVED

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## Becoming a member of Neighbourhood or Home Watch

Neighbourhood Watch and Home Watch schemes are community initiatives that are supported by the police but are owned and run by their members.

You may be already living within a Neighbourhood or Home Watch area. In order to find out if there is a scheme where you live you can use our postcode search on our website at [www.ourwatch.org.uk/your\\_local\\_area/](http://www.ourwatch.org.uk/your_local_area/). If there is a group in your area you will be able to contact the scheme coordinator to find out about joining their scheme. Your search results will also give you lots of useful police and community-related information for where you live.

Individual schemes have different characteristics, depending on the area in which they are situated and their objectives. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) supports schemes that are organised and run in a non-discriminatory manner at local, area, county and national level.

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## How to set up a new scheme

Anybody in a neighbourhood, however large or small, can set up a scheme. The first step is to speak to your neighbours and find out if they are interested in starting a scheme. The more residents there are who want to get involved, the more successful a scheme will be. But not everyone in a street or neighbourhood needs to join a scheme for it to work. It will work as long as there are enough residents to keep an eye out for each other's properties and to liaise with the police.

Swedish researcher Erika Sallander has produced a useful guide on setting up and maintaining Neighbourhood or Home Watch in flats and other kinds of buildings with multiple family occupancy - *Neighbourhood Watch in Multiple Family Dwellings*. This was produced for the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet) but is equally useful in the UK if the term 'local authority area' is substituted for 'municipality'.

The guide is aimed at local crime prevention councils (or, in the UK, Community Safety Partnerships), the police, landlords and residents' associations rather than individuals wishing to start a Neighbourhood or Home Watch scheme, but it could be useful for you to pass on to your contacts in the above organisations, and it contains many ideas and suggestions which you might find helpful, particularly around conducting a survey in advance of setting up a scheme. You can download the guide at <https://www.bra.se/bra/bra-in-english/home/publications/archive/publications/2012-12-21-neighbourhood-watch-in-multiple-family-dwellings.html>

To make things even easier, we have some useful letters and flyers on our website, designed to help you introduce yourself and encourage your neighbours to join you. These can be found at [www.ourwatch.org.uk/resource\\_centre/members\\_area/](http://www.ourwatch.org.uk/resource_centre/members_area/)

If you and your neighbours want to start a scheme, you should decide how it is going to be organised. The closer the links with the police, the more effective a scheme will be.

The postcode search on our website is a good place to start as it also helps you find contact details for your Neighbourhood Policing Team who can put you in touch with the right people to help you start a scheme. This might be a contact at the local Neighbourhood Watch Association or there may be a dedicated officer or someone with specific responsibility for Neighbourhood Watch issues at your local police station. This is not necessarily a police officer, but can be someone employed by the police in this role.

Once you have established your local point of contact and you have the support of your neighbours, you can then begin to plan how to run your scheme effectively. Your first job is to appoint a coordinator.

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## **Role of a Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator**

The traditional role of a Watch coordinator is to set up and maintain a scheme within a specific neighbourhood. They can also work closely with committee members and their local Neighbourhood Policing Team and other officers.

Once identified, each coordinator can then develop their own way to run the scheme which suits them and their members. The provision of accurate data for communication purposes regarding members within their scheme will ensure that a two-way flow of information is available to all. This will assist in assuring that you can be advised on the local crime picture, on personal safety and property security, and local initiatives. It also serves to establish a contact to whom you can report suspicious characters and incidents.

Whatever is decided by the members, the role of a coordinator does not have to become a burden. They may wish to form a committee to assist them. Some of the issues you may wish to consider are:

1. Do you need a deputy coordinator?
2. Do you need to set up a small committee?
3. Do you need to appoint a treasurer?
4. How will you fund the scheme (e.g. joining fees, grants etc.)?
5. How will you cover the costs of running the scheme (e.g. newsletters, meetings)?
6. How will you communicate with members (e.g. email, telephone or a communication system)?
7. Will you produce newsletters? If so, how often and who will draft them?
8. How often will you meet and where?

Some officers and/or Neighbourhood Policing Teams will attend scheme meetings and participate in other activities such as home security surveys. The scheme is community-led and is supported by the police, not run by them, so success of the scheme relies on all volunteers to make it work.

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## Working together

Traditionally, Neighbourhood Watch activities have focused on the immediate vicinity of homes, with members looking out for anything suspicious or helping their neighbours as necessary. It is now estimated that around 3.8 million households in England and Wales are members of a scheme. You can find out more about the Crime Survey for England and Wales at [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/science-research/research-statistics/crime/crime-statistics/british-crime-survey/](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/science-research/research-statistics/crime/crime-statistics/british-crime-survey/)

However, more and more schemes are broadening their work to target a range of other problems such as anti-social behaviour, vandalism and graffiti. When links are made with other local schemes and wider associations are formed, the membership can become a powerful voice within a community and can begin to:

- Identify issues of local concern and draw them to the attention of local agencies.
- Become involved in community problem-solving, including taking part in local forums to agree which problems to target and what actions to take.
- Get involved in initiatives aimed at tackling crime, disorder, and anti-social behaviour, preventing the incidence of fire, and reducing the risk of environmental damage.
- Promote crime prevention and home safety.
- Provide volunteer administrators and coordinators to assist paid (police/local authority) Neighbourhood and Home Watch staff in the effective running of schemes.
- Monitor local incidences of crime and anti-social behaviour, and report them to the police and local authority.
- Form associations at district and county/police force area level to share good practice.
- Recruit new members to Neighbourhood and Home Watch schemes.
- Establish links and work with other types of Watch scheme, and more widely with other bodies in the voluntary, public, and private sectors (particularly tenants' and residents' associations, and Neighbourhood Policing Teams and their local panels).
- Adhere to the principles and undertakings outlined in The Compact [<http://www.thecompact.org.uk/information/100024/regions/>] on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England to help to shape excellent partnerships between statutory agencies and the voluntary and community sector.

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## Working with partners

Neighbourhood Watch works best where there is a strong relationship between the group and the local police. The police cannot deal with the problems and issues arising from crime and anti-social behaviour alone – they need the help of the community. At a local level, Neighbourhood Policing

Teams should liaise with Neighbourhood Watch volunteers on a regular basis.

Volunteers have an important role to play in sharing information with the police about suspicious events in their area. People really can make a difference to the safety of their community by reporting what they see. Neighbourhood Watch also gives people the chance to get to know and help each other better. Similarly, the police have a crucial role in sharing information about recent crimes in the area. Neighbourhood Policing Teams (NPTs) should maintain close links with Neighbourhood & Home Watch coordinators to enable a two-way flow of communication and keep volunteers abreast of issues affecting their local neighbourhood that they may be able to help with.

For example, coordinators can be warned of local crime trends through electronic communication systems. This enables the coordinator of the local group to warn residents, who then have an opportunity to take appropriate precautions to avoid becoming victims themselves.

Many police forces in England and Wales also have specific members of staff who deal with Neighbourhood & Home Watch issues, whose role is to communicate with coordinators and support the activities of local groups. Almost every force in England & Wales has a force Single Point of Contact (SPOC) responsible for Neighbourhood and Home Watch issues. Neighbourhood Watch groups may also work with other agencies within their area such as the Police and Crime Commissioner, Police and Crime Panels, the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), local authority environmental health teams, Trading Standards services, Fire & Rescue services and many other agencies who share the responsibility of keeping your neighbourhood safe from both crime and anti-social behaviour.

Some police forces have dedicated staff who will attend scheme meetings and participate in other activities such as home security surveys. Neighbourhood and Home Watch is community-led and is supported by the police, not run by them, so success of the scheme relies on all volunteers to make it work.

**South Tyneside Association of Neighbourhood Watches (STANW), South Tyneside, North East**

South Tyneside Association of Neighbourhood Watches (STANW) is a forum of representatives from Neighbourhood Watch groups across South Tyneside district. The Forum has a Chair, Vice Chair and Treasurer and is made up of representatives from each of 15 localities across the district.

The legal services team within Northumbria Police assisted with the development of STANW's constitution and legal documentation. This has ensured that the police have been involved from the initial establishment of the Forum and in doing so their involvement has served to endorse the Association's purpose and appeal to local Neighbourhood Watch groups. The legally constituted status of the group has enabled it to apply for and receive funding in order to support its range of activities across the district.