



RUNNING A NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH SCHEME

Setting aims & objectives for your scheme

One of the most important steps when starting up a scheme is to decide on its aims and objectives. Here is a simple four-step process for setting the aims and objectives of your scheme.

Step 1: Identify the problems

Your first step in setting up a Neighbourhood Watch or Home Watch must be to ask: 'What do we want to achieve in our street, neighbourhood or estate?' Think about the specific problems you have and how Neighbourhood Watch can help reduce them. Every area is different.

Stop and think: 'What do people in this area see as their problems?' The easiest way of doing this is, of course, to ask your neighbours and other local residents. You might also want to look at your area's crime statistics on www.police.uk.

Step 2: Decide what you can do

Once you have identified the problems, think about what your Neighbourhood Watch group might be able to do to help solve them or improve the situation. This might involve making links with other organisations such as the police or local authority. It could include holding meetings or events. Whatever you do, make sure the focus stays on addressing the identified problems.

Step 3: How can you make it happen?

Think about the resources that will help you to carry out your planned activities. Resources don't just mean money; they also include things like time, space for meetings, and access to resources such as stationery and printers.

People's time is the most important resource; without it your scheme will not run properly. So at this point the most important question to ask is 'Are we prepared to give the commitment to make it happen?'

Step 4: Will our activities really help to solve the problems?

If your plans do not meet your original expectations, it is important that you alter them before you put them into action. It is much easier to change things at the beginning than later on.

Maintaining your scheme

Each year you should review your scheme to ensure that it is achieving its goals. Start by looking at your original expectations and the activities you decided on. Then ask: 'Have we achieved what we set out to do, have we done even better, or are we just standing still?' Depending on the result of your review, you could change your activities and their emphasis to ensure that your scheme remains responsive to the needs of its members. It's important that you don't treat your original plans as set in stone, because you should be able to react to changes in your area.

Neighbourhood Watch Associations

You should have already contacted your force area [Neighbourhood Watch Association](#) – if there is one covering your area – when you set the scheme up. However, you may want to get together with nearby schemes to form a smaller Association covering an individual police beat or a slightly larger area like a district, police division, village or town, or even just meet or communicate to share good practice.

The first step is to make contact with neighbouring coordinators. Either your force area Association or the police should be able to help you with this. Then you can decide whether you want to hold regular meetings or stay in touch some other way. Later on the group could expand further. Lead coordinators could then form a formal Association with a constitution, action plan and an elected committee.

Relaunching a scheme

Sadly, despite the hard work of individuals, some Neighbourhood Watch schemes do become inactive. The question of whether an ailing scheme can be revitalised is often asked. The answer is 'yes', but it needs to be done in a structured way, or you will only recreate the same problems that caused it to fail in the first place.

If your Neighbourhood Watch group is ready to close, there is little point in sitting in a room talking over who did or didn't do what, why it had no support and what else went wrong. Your scheme needs to be reconsidered step by step and given a new character. Instead of trying to sell the same thing to the same people with the same poor results, you'll have to change people's perceptions of the scheme.

Revitalising your scheme

Before you start, there is one rule you must follow if you don't want the whole exercise to be a waste of time – look at the scheme, not the members. It is essential that you concentrate on why the scheme failed and not on the people in the scheme. There are all sorts of good reasons why people lose their commitment to Neighbourhood Watch – for example a family illness, job insecurity, or other personal reasons. Trying to place the blame on individuals won't move your scheme any further forward and may damage it beyond repair.

Now let's look at the steps involved in revitalising a scheme.

At the beginning of this document, there were four steps to consider when starting up a new scheme. You will need to go through the same steps:

- When you first started the scheme, what were the expectations – what did people hope to gain from the scheme?
- What activities were there to support the scheme?
- What were the commitments in terms of time, resources and finance?
- Were your activities and commitments enough to meet the expectations you agreed on?

Having listed your expectations, activities and commitments, the next stage is to look at each item and ask: ‘Did we achieve this or not? If not, can it be put right?’

Try and think of the good things you achieved and work out how you can build on them to relaunch the scheme. Once you have decided where things went wrong and how to put them right, you have the task of once again ‘selling’ the scheme to potential members. You will need to alter both the scheme’s image and the timing or occasion.

Changing the image

While you obviously need to keep the title ‘Neighbourhood Watch’, you could slightly expand the scheme’s area and alter its name, even if it covers virtually the same area. You can also change the image by altering the design of your newsletter or publicity material. You could consider setting up a website.

When you consider the timing of your relaunch, try to take advantage of local events. For example, a spate of burglaries, although not the happiest of circumstances, would present an opportune time to relaunch. Or a local event where lots of people are gathered together is a good opportunity to create enthusiasm.

Keeping it going

Keep checking that you are still on course to achieve your objectives. Consider reviewing your position every three months, at least in the initial stages. Don’t forget to keep a record of whatever you decide to do – this will help you later when you look back on your successes or things that need improving.