

Focus Groups de-brief: Neighbourhood Watch

Dates: 11-12-2018 and 13-01-2018; 7-9pm

Theme: Perceptions of policing, confidence in policing, communities taking action to keep safer, crime prevention support and how we together work to keep residents safer.

Background

To build upon our positive and proactive engagement with Neighbourhood Watch (NHW), and to coincide with the pilot trial of our coffee shop consultations, Performance and Information undertook two focus groups with NHW area leads. The purpose was to engage with NHW, to gain the thoughts and views on perceptions of policing, confidence in policing, communities taking action to keep safer, crime prevention support and how we together work to keep residents safer.

A total of 17 NHW members took part across the two evenings, at Winchester and Basingstoke. The group sizes allowed for free flowing discussion and the opportunity for all to contribute.

Key Discussions

Media influence: members feel as if there is a surge in highlighting reduced policing numbers, budget cuts. When there are local crimes in the news, members spoke of frustration by residents of traditional crimes e.g. JCB ATM break-ins, questioning why the police aren't there to stop such crimes.

Some members spoke of feeling the police are 'between a rock and a hard place', and that NHW act as a supporting agent for the police. Members see the local areas police cover are increasing, so residents may not see local policing as they used to.

Recognition that the lower level crimes can't always be investigated by the police, knowing resources are finite. Feel there is a focus on crimes where you don't always see the police 'out in force' the lack of visibility of police office affirms this for members, but members do recognise the police are investigating more complex crimes. Recognise the challenges of policing dealing with a range of crimes in the same day, officers need to be highly trained in both traditional and hidden crime types. Discussion around mental health and the increased demand this has on policing. NHW members spoke of analysts needing to be able to better target policing resources.

Changing nature of crimes: need to raise awareness of the range of crime types, face to face contact for residents, there is a need to increase knowledge/educate residents.

Residents feels that when they do call 101/999 with actionable evidence/intelligence, feel it's not acted upon. Residents feel they don't get

feedback on crimes so no motivation for residents to keep on reporting crimes they see/hear about. Some members spoke of Police/Action Fraud, do not have the capacity to report back to individuals, but needing to trust the system.

Discussion around reporting to the police and how there needs to be more information around how to use 101/999 and online reporting. Frustration of 101 call waiting times.

Residents don't have confidence in policing or NHW. NHW feel they should be getting more information ahead of time, this used to happen before the Hants Alert system, feeling were once trusted to help the police, the role of NHW needs to be more formalised. Feel the need to want to help, but often left feeling helpless. There is a disconnect between the information shared via social media e.g. Facebook and what is shared via Hants Alerts. Others spoke of feeling the Hants Alerts system has improved communication between the police and residents.

Discussion around community, members spoke of this not only where you live but the people around you. A group of likeminded people coming together e.g. for businesses (shop watch), pub watch etc. Community: watching out for each other/togetherness, bringing people together, partnership working.

Varying confidence levels in the police. Young people will accept the ways things currently are, but older populations are used to the 'bobby on the beat' view. Have confidence in police officers, it's the policing arena in general there is a lack of confidence.

Turnover of police officers in a local neighbourhood setting can be high, NHW members can feel more senior engagement can feel like a 'tick box exercise', if/when people do move on, often NHW coordinators aren't notified.

Policing beat community areas, set three priorities, but these can be different geographically for NHW areas. In some areas NHW members are looking at community forums and trying to develop these to ensure all areas are included in.

Discussion that the role of NHW is to remind residents to take basic 'keep safe' steps such as locking doors. Need to get an authoritative message out on local radio stations. NHW members spoke of wanting to be able to apply for small grants. NF informed that NHW can do this via the commissioned services grants round.

Recognition that NHW is essential, a partnership with the police not a replacement but the eyes and ears/face to face reassurance. NHW can act as PR for the police, promoting the work of local policing. NHW have the on the ground knowledge of local communities. NHW feel they need literature/materials to engage with the public, especially those older in our communities. NHW recognise the need to identify the unique selling point of

joining NHW and signing up to be a NHW coordinator, recruitment of volunteers is always needed.

Members spoke of NHW merging into the PCSO role, of community safety. Role of motivating residents to take an active part, community responsibility is everyone's responsibility, making people aware of the way things have changed and what they can do to protect themselves. Members would like to know what the police think of NHW, feel that not all police value NHW.

NHW access crime prevention advice via PCSOs, Hampshire Constabulary website, NHW toolkit, local council. Some NHW areas have residents who are happy to share what's happening locally e.g. crimes, suspicious behaviours, though recognise the need to move online to get traction with a younger audience, business owners etc, this generates the face to face of letting NHW coordinators know of local crimes.

Some members strongly feel there are not enough police officers, feel public standards are dropping knowing that there are not enough police on the beat and so can 'get away with low level crimes' e.g. jumping red lights, shop lifting. Question the moral of the police force, know police officers personally (friends/family).

To get confidence back in policing, there is a need to get the backing of the general public, feel that there needs to be a visible focus on traditional types of crimes. Getting communities used to change, having the honest communication while not 'scaring residents', telling the story of the change in resources, deployment and crimes locally. NHW can share the message of the work of the police, act as the PR for the force.

OPCC: best to engage with the public via the coordinators. NHW feel that prior to Hants Alerts, NHW coordinators had better intelligence in their local areas, now they receive information just as anyone else would, don't have the relationship that once was.

Next Steps

To build in quarterly focus groups with NHW members, building upon our qualitative evidence base.

NHW members to report back to Margaret and Bob re: challenges/issues with policing colleagues so these can be logged and escalated where necessary.