POLICING AND NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH: STRATEGIC ISSUES

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The Home Office Police Research Group (PRG) was formed in 1992 to carry out and manage research relevant to the work of the police service. The terms of reference for the Group include the requirement to identify and disseminate good policing practice.

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Foreword

The growth of Neighbourhood Watch has been a crime prevention success story. There are now over 130,000 schemes in the United Kingdom all testifying to the commitment felt by the public to working with the police and other groups in controlling crime.

Contributing to the launch and maintenance of schemes is not, however, without cost to the police service and the time has now come to think through in a more strategic manner the way in which police support can both effectively and efficiently be delivered. This report, in addition to summarising some of the published research on Neighbourhood Watch, makes some proposals for strategic development which the police, Neighbourhood Watch coordinators and scheme members may like to consider. They are no more than proposals, but we hope they will be helpful in setting out one option for the constructive development of Neighbourhood Watch in the United Kingdom.

I M BURNS
Deputy Under Secretary of State
Home Office
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Executive summary

Background

The number of Neighbourhood Watch schemes and the proportion of households covered by schemes has grown dramatically in the United Kingdom over the past decade. All schemes involve local police forces to some extent, and at a time of rising crime and constant pressure on these resources the nature and extent of police involvement in Neighbourhood Watch needs to be kept under review.

The report makes a series of proposals for the way in which Neighbourhood Watch might be developed, which it is hoped will stimulate local debate. The social and policing context within which these proposals are made is important and these are discussed fully in the report as is the research literature on the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Watch.

Report summary

The report discusses the way in which the definition of Neighbourhood Watch has developed from its initial inception as 'the eyes and ears of the police' to a more community-based movement operating with police support. It then provides a brief review of the research literature on the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Watch as a crime reduction measure, but also considers the many other effects Neighbourhood Watch can have on community life. The review shows that:

- the activities implemented as part of Neighbourhood Watch are very variable;
- Neighbourhood Watch has been implemented in widely differing contexts, but most commonly in areas of relative affluence and low crime rates;
- there is some evidence that in certain circumstances Neighbourhood Watch can reduce crime, notably burglary;
- areas with very high crime rates pose particular problems in introducing and maintaining schemes;
- in some areas, Neighbourhood Watch has helped enhance a sense of community, and
- Neighbourhood Watch has attracted widespread support, but low levels of commitment for involvement from members, although high commitment from many coordinators.

A comprehensive review of the published literature is provided in an appendix.

Against this background, the report suggests that the police should adopt a strategic approach to developing Neighbourhood Watch and proposes how this might be done.

Proposals

The report suggests that the purpose of Neighbourhood Watch, its characteristics and the extent of police involvement should be related to the crime rate in the area.

In low crime areas, covering about 60% of households, Neighbourhood Watch might aim to keep the crime rate low; maintain public confidence and good police/public relations; reduce fear of crime; guard against vigilantes, and reinforce the community commitment to a set of crime free standards. Police involvement in such schemes might be on the basis of requests from the public rather than being positively promoted by forces, with the consequent demand on resources. Schemes in these areas might, amongst other things, be self-funded with an emphasis on volunteering.

In *medium crime areas,* which cover about 25% of households, attempts might be made to reduce the crime rate and the fear of crime; to increase informal neighbourhood control by residents of minor incivilities and general nuisance, and to improve police/public relations. In reflection of these different aims, the characteristics of schemes may also differ from the low crime areas. They would, for example, involve other agencies, particularly the local authority; plan initiatives in collaboration with local community groups and tenants' associations where they exist, and establish local mechanisms for a prompt response to vandalism and neighbour disputes. All this may require the more active involvement of police forces particularly in providing crime data and encouraging schemes on 'at risk' estates.

Finally, in *high crime areas,* which according to British Crime Survey data may be either relatively poor local authority housing or gentrified inner-city areas, a priority would be to reduce crime and fear; increase community control and public confidence, and in the economically poorer areas particularly to increase public confidence in the police. The characteristics of schemes in poorer areas when compared with gentrified areas may be different. For example, considerable multi-agency support may be needed in poorer areas to introduce and maintain schemes. It may even be difficult for the police to do so in the most disadvantaged areas and, in any event, 'tailor-made' schemes would be required to reflect the sensitivities of the community. In the relatively affluent gentrified areas, schemes might be easier to launch and maintain and can be overtly police-led without the risk of community conflict.

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1. Introduction

This report considers Neighbourhood Watch from a number of perspectives with a particular concern for its policy implications and the effect it has had on policing. It does not address detailed arrangements for the efficient and effective management of individual schemes, guidance on which is issued by Crime Concern (Husain and Williams, 1993) and other agencies. Rather, the discussion assumes first that at the heart of Neighbourhood Watch lie police-community partnerships, but second that the police have limited resources to allocate to the launch and maintenance of schemes. The central question is, therefore, what is the most appropriate strategic approach for the police to adopt in relation to Neighbourhood Watch, to enhance its effectiveness as the movement develops. This is not to deny that Neighbourhood Watch schemes belong to their members. Of course they do. It is only to acknowledge that although the police have a remit in relation to schemes, they also have a wider remit for the communities they serve.

The paper begins with discussion of definitions of Neighbourhood Watch drawing on the published research literature and on Neighbourhood Watch in practice in the United Kingdom. It considers the proliferation of watch schemes that have developed over the last decade and notes some of the reasons why this has had happened.

A key question in relation to Neighbourhood Watch of course is whether or not it works. The evidence in relation to this is summarised in the second section of the report, but is discussed fully in the appendix where questions are asked about how Neighbourhood Watch could work if it were to. Its effect on crime is considered but so also is its effect on police public relations and on offenders and their view of the world.

The third section covers the apparent popularity of Neighbourhood Watch in its various guises. It looks at issues such as its effect on community spirit and vigilantism. The report then goes on to consider whether or not Neighbourhood Watch can or indeed should be maintained. Here issues of resource management and the relationship between quality of service and effectiveness and efficiency are considered. The question of the cost of Neighbourhood Watch has to be a consideration in this section, as has the extent to which it should be seen as a police-led activity. The report concludes with a series of options for the development of Neighbourhood Watch based on the research which is discussed throughout the report.

2. Definitions and extent

At its inception in the early 1980s in this country, Neighbourhood Watch was seen as a primarily police-led activity. Force instructions, issued by the Metropolitan Police in June 1983, for example, define Neighbourhood Watch as

> "primarily a network of public spirited members of the community, who observe what is going on in their own neighbourhood and report suspicious activity to the police. In simple terms, the. citizen becomes "the eyes and ears" of the police, looking out for the usual and unusual to protect their own home and that of their neighbour, thereby reducing opportunities for criminal activity. The neighbourhood becomes a safer place to live, and the fear of crime is reduced."

This definition restricted Neighbourhood Watch, seeing it primarily as contributing to the surveillance opportunities in the neighbourhood. It was clearly implicit that there would be greater communication between the public and the police in the light of what had been seen or heard.

In a report published by the Home Office Crime Prevention Unit in 1988, Husain broadened this definition:

> "Neighbourhood Watch is generally understood to be a community-based activity supported by local police that is directed towards crime prevention. It involves residents becoming more responsive to the risk of crime and taking action to protect their own and neighbours' property. Such action may include marking property, reporting suspicious activities and improving home security, which reduce opportunity for crime and increase the risk of detection".

Not only did the definition broaden to include activities beyond surveillance, but the focus shifted from the public assisting the police (in the earlier Metropolitan Police view), to a community-based activity supported by the police.

Bennett (1990) also sees Neighbourhood Watch as going beyond the 'eyes and ears' functions. Although this is seen as a major element in the operation of Neighbourhood Watch, Bennett argues that insofar as it might reduce crime, it would do so by reducing the opportunities for offending by altering the cost/rewards balance as perceived by potential offenders. An increase in the risk of capture leads to a reduction in the number of 'safe' opportunities for crime.

A second dimension to Neighbourhood Watch, and thus a second mechanism through which it might prove effective in crime control, is the increased potential created for informal pressures not to behave anti-socially. This is given legitimacy by the community consensus to introduce Neighbourhood Watch. Community members can be seen thereby to operate independently of the police, but to some extent with and within their authority. At its extreme, informal community

responses could take the form of vigilantism, which is not encouraged in this country or elsewhere. The line between active informal neighbourhood control and potentially dangerous vigilantism can, however, be a fine one. An advantage of a Neighbourhood Watch structure is that it maintains links with the police and consequently the probability of the worst case scenario of vigilantes can be reduced.

As we can see from published statements about Neighbourhood Watch, and as is indeed reinforced by the way in which it is operated on the ground, there are an increasing number of elements to the process. What began as a simple entreaty from the police to watch out for suspicious circumstances and report them, has now developed into a whole package of activity ranging from on the one hand crime-related issues such as property marking and security surveys to, on the other, coffee mornings and street cleaning activities. In many respects, Neighbourhood Watch has become an empty vessel into which differing practice contents can be poured, albeit for the excellent reason of maintaining the local focus and community control. This has, however, left it as an initiative almost impossible to evaluate in any sensible way, particularly since it has been implemented or in some cases partially implemented in widely varying types of community where any possible effect on crime and crime rates will necessarily be variable.

Nor has it been abundantly clear in the definitions of Neighbourhood Watch which particular offence it is supposed to affect. The obvious starting point in this respect was domestic burglary, but a number of studies have spilled over into evaluating the effect on theft of and from motor vehicles, vandalism and criminal damage, and indeed street crime more generally. Furthermore, in many local authority estates, for example, it is not always the most serious crimes such as burglary which cause difficulties for the majority of residents. Rather it is the overall quality of life, packs of dogs, litter, graffiti, troublesome neighbours - a dripping tap 365 days of the year that wears people down. And it is tackling these issues which commands community support.

The definition of Neighbourhood Watch - what we mean by it precisely - is an extremely important issue in two respects, first in its introduction in communities, where not only the police but the public themselves need to be clear what precisely they are signing up to, and secondly in relation to any attempt to evaluate it, for it is obviously crucial to understand what is being evaluated and on what it is supposed to have an effect.

The view of Neighbourhood Watch taken in this report is a relatively catholic one. It sees it as a set of activities which may affect crime rates, particularly burglary and motor vehicle crime, but also fear of crime, police public contacts and police public relations, community cohesion (or divisiveness) and cost.

DEFINITIONS AND EXTENT

Neighbourhood Watch as a concept has also been adopted and modified in a variety of other contexts although these are not the major concern of this report. It could, for example, be seen as one of the most successful marketing strategies of the decade! It has spawned a proliferation of lookalikes covering Vehicle Watch, Taxi Watch, Boat Watch, Saddle Watch, Pub Watch, Shop Watch, Cattle Watch etc. It is almost true to say that if anything constitutes a mobile piece of property, then somewhere in the United Kingdom there will be a Watch scheme set up to watch it. These are interestingly related to the local nature of crime so, for example, Devon and Cornwall Constabulary would promote Caravan Watch while North Wales are more interested in Sheep Watch! To some extent expansion of this kind illustrates the ease with which schemes can be launched but calls into serious question the extent to which they can be maintained or properly serviced. This question is discussed in greater detail below and is, of course, a key issue for all of these activities.

Although in the remainder of this report reference may be made to various alternative "Watches", the bulk of it is concerned with Neighbourhood Watch as it applies within normal domestic communities and as it is seen in that context.

There are currently over 130,000 Neighbourhood Watch schemes in the United Kingdom. Information on the exact location of these schemes is held by the police, but is not centrally collated. In a separate research exercise, the results of which were published in 1988, Husain showed the disproportionate extent to which Neighbourhood Watch features in relatively low crime areas. At the time of his research there were over 42,000 schemes in operation with probably more than 2.5 million households living within a Neighbourhood Watch area. Husain's research was designed to determine the way in which Neighbourhood Watch operated and to examine the extent to which Neighbourhood Watch practice at that time satisfied the needs of participants. There was also concern to ascertain where precisely Neighbourhood Watch schemes were located in terms of the types of neighbourhood and to consider whether changes in Neighbourhood Watch policy or practice could increase or spread the benefits.

In carrying out the research, he took data from nine police force areas with active Neighbourhood Watch involvement; this covered 3,699 schemes and all ACORN neighbourhood types (Hough and Mayhew, 1985). He then sent questionnaires to a sub-sample of Neighbourhood Watch coordinators, but was only able to obtain data from 165 schemes. These were broadly representative of low, medium and high risk Acorn areas. Husain found schemes in all Acorn groups but the spread was by no means uniform. Most schemes were in low-risk areas and relatively few in the high risk areas covering the poorest council estates, multi-racial areas and high status non-family areas which are often located in inner city regeneration pockets.

The same picture is evident from the British Crime Survey (BCS), which has asked more than 10,000 householders questions about Neighbourhood Watch in several of its sweeps. Table 1 gives the picture from the 1992 survey. It shows first the distribution of schemes across different ACORN areas; over 70% were in the low-risk neighbourhoods as against only one in ten in high-risk neighbourhoods. Second, the percentage of households who were scheme members can be seen to differ along the same lines; nearly three-quarters of all scheme members were in low-risk areas. These patterns, third, do not reflect the distribution of households in the country. Thus, for instance, 60% of households live in low-risk areas, as against 73% of scheme members; low-risk areas, then, are more characterised by Neighbourhood Watch activity than one would expect if this was evenly spread, while riskier areas are less so.

BCS analysis has shown that between 1988 and 1992 membership levels have increased in all areas, but the increase was greatest in lowest-risk areas. These areas already had relatively good Neighbourhood Watch coverage in 1988, so the gap between membership levels across the risk areas has widened slightly (Mayhew and Dowds, 1994).

Table I- ACORN Classification of scheme neighborhoods and households in schemes compared with all households

ACORN neighbourhood group		% of schemes	% of h'hlds in schemes	% of all h'hlds
A.	Agricultural areas	3.1	3.1	2.8
B.	Modern family housing, higher income	18.9	17.6	16.7
C.	Older housing of intermediate status	16.7	17.0	18.2
J.	Affluent suburban housing	27.9	29.4	17.9
K.	Better-off retirement areas	4.6	5.4	4.6
Low-risk areas		71.2	72.6	60.1
D.	Poorquality older terraced housing	2.7	2.9	4.3
E.	Better-off council estates	8.2	7.8	11.3
F.	Less well-off council estates	7.0	6.7	9.7
Medium-risk areas		17.8	17.4	25.3
G.	Poorest council estates	2.6	2.4	4.1
H.	Multi-racial areas	2.2	1.9	3.5
I.	High status non-family areas	5.4	4.7	5.8
High-risk areas		10.1	9.1	13.4
Total (incl. unclassified)		100	100	100

Source: 1992 British Crime Survey (weighted data)

PEFINITIONS AND EXTENT

The location of Neighbourhood Watch, or the social 'context' within which it has been introduced is important in two particular senses. First, the disproportionate presence of schemes in low crime areas raises questions about the appropriate allocation of police resources. Whilst it is clearly the case that low crime, relatively middle class, areas have as much right of access to policing (and Neighbourhood Watch) as more problematic areas, Husain's data show that in the low risk areas, 28% of schemes were initiated by the police themselves compared with only 16% in high risk areas. In contrast, 57% of schemes were initiated by the coordinator or other resident(s) in low risk areas and 68% in high risk contexts.

While it is one thing for the police to respond to requests for Neighbourhood Watch in low crime areas, it is a different matter for them to take initiating action there, with the implication that resources will follow. Cynics might argue that this is done in order to boost the numbers of Neighbourhood Watch schemes in 'soft' areas, although in fact police public relations may be improved and this is a quite legitimate reason for the introduction or support of Watch schemes in low crime areas, provided they are not at disproportionate cost. This point is discussed more fully toward the end of this report.

The second reason for the importance of the context within which schemes are introduced, relates to the evaluation of its effectiveness. This is considered more fully in the appendix but, briefly, a reasonable level of offending needs to be present in an area if any initiative is to be capable of statistical evaluation. In many of the low risk areas, domestic burglary, for example, would be so low prior to the establishment of Neighbourhood Watch that any attempt at evaluation would be futile. In addition, some attention must be paid to the mechanism (Pawson & Tilley, 1994) through which Neighbourhood Watch might operate if it were to be effective. In low crime areas, where the public would, in any case, phone the police if they saw something suspicious etc, it is difficult to see what that mechanism might be.

3. Does it work?

There have been several attempts to evaluate Neighbourhood Watch. All have more or less serious methodological flaws, which means that none is entirely dependable. The methods and main findings of published studies are discussed in a detailed review which forms the Appendix to this paper. This examines the research evidence for the overall crime prevention effectiveness of Neighbourhood Watch as a package of activities, and for the success of individual elements. It also looks at findings concerning the impact of Neighbourhood Watch on fear of crime, police-public relationships, informal victim support, and the development of community spirit. Finally, it summarises the suggestions made in some studies that there may be circumstances in which Neighbourhood Watch can have undesirable side-effects.

In spite of the weaknesses in the individual studies of Neighbourhood Watch, and their conflicting findings on some matters, the following can probably now be concluded with some confidence:

1. What has been implemented within Neighbourhood Watch is very variable. There is often only low dosage crime prevention activity.

2. Neighbourhood Watch has been implemented in widely differing contexts, but much more commonly in areas which are relatively affluent and have by national standards a low crime rate.

3. Given that implementation has characteristically been very partial and that the prevailing crime rates in areas in which Neighbourhood Watch has most readily been established are typically already low, failure consistently to find crime reductions following the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch is unsurprising.

4. Evidence exists that Neighbourhood Watch can and sometimes has produced reductions in crime, notably burglary. There is, though, no reason to believe that it will always do so. Where Neighbourhood Witch has been found to be associated with falls in crime it is not clear how these were achieved. Indeed, the literature raises some doubts about the implementation and efficacy of some traditional Neighbourhood Watch measures.

5. Very high crime, inner city areas pose particular problems. In some cases intimidation of residents, and the potential for further divisiveness in the neighbourhood may suggest the development of alternative community responses to crime and incivility. Moreover, where local offenders are neighbours that part of Neighbourhood Watch which emphasises surveillance of and reports on strangers (or neighbours) as a way of reducing risk is inappropriate to the context:

6. There is evidence that Neighbourhood Watch has helped catalyse community cohesion in some circumstances. Although not directly related to crime reduction the value of this should not be underestimated as preparing the ground for later crime-related action. Changing attitudes, and behaviour, takes time.

7. Neighbourhood Watch has tended typically to attract fairly widespread general support but low levels of commitment or involvement from members if not coordinators. This, it should be said, is not unique to Neighbourhood Watch. Many citizen participation schemes suffer similarly, eg. parent/teacher associations, unions, tenants' associations etc.

There is a need for further work on what within Neighbourhood Watch will maximise its benefits and minimise its costs in the very varying social and physical contexts in which it can operate. The final section of this report addresses the issue as could future evaluation studies.

4. Why is Neighbourhood Watch so popular?

Neighbourhood Watch has what social scientists would call 'face validity'- in other words, it makes sense. The notion that surveillance will reduce crime which is firmly embedded in the concept of watching, is very persuasive as a technique for crime control. Indeed, Felson (1994) argues that the presence of capable guardians is one necessary condition for effective crime control and it is just such guardians that Neighbourhood Watch attempts to generate. Furthermore, it is not only the surveillance elements of Neighbourhood Watch which have appeal. The notion that the public can work with the police, can improve their security, and can mark their property all contribute to reinforcing the view that Neighbourhood Watch schemes might hand control back to the community.

In practice, Neighbourhood Watch members may be required to do no more than put a label in their window declaring their membership. Many fail to attend meetings, do not mark their property and do not have security surveys. This possibility of what might be called token membership of Neighbourhood Watch schemes contributes to their apparent popularity. The more that is required by way of commitment from the general public, the less popular will be any initiative.

In those middle-class areas where Neighbourhood Watch is particularly prone to flourish, it is also quite conceivable that it increases the opportunities for householders to develop an improved community relationship. Coffee mornings, bring and buy sales and wine and cheese parties all become possible under the banner of Neighbourhood Watch and all are relatively popular within middle-class areas. Such events, when linked to Neighbourhood Watch, lead to better informed communities on crime issues, and contribute to the continued maintenance of good police/public relations.

Neighbourhood Watch can also be seen to provide an opportunity for the more active members of the community to find a legitimate role. It enables the skills and experience of individuals who might otherwise have no suitable outlet for their energy to contribute in a useful way within their area.

The Neighbourhood Watch movement, in making relatively few demands on its membership, is particularly attractive to those members of the community who would like to he seen to contribute, but to do so on their own terms. Relatively little is demanded of members and the extent to which demands are made on Neighbourhood Watch coordinators will vary with the scheme and its area, but in any case, the coordinators themselves will generally have a considerable amount of control over the effort they expend in relation to their own scheme. It is therefore possible to see Neighbourhood Watch as a very useful opportunity for volunteers to contribute to their local community, to an extent defined by them. Neighbourhood Watch also has the considerable advantage of being open to all comers in terms of volunteering. There is no age requirement, for example, as might be the case with joining, the special constabulary; all are very welcome.

WHY IS NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH SO POPULAR?

The fact that Neighbourhood Watch has developed in such a way as to become 'all things to all people' has in many ways facilitated its development. It is open to local interpretation as to what goes into the Neighbourhood Watch pot in terms of its content, commitment, orientation and span of control. All of these comments, of course, relate to the perception of Neighbourhood Watch largely from the point of view of the community and its members. The perspective from the police service is somewhat different and it is certainly possible to question whether Neighbourhood Watch is popular in certain sections of the police force. Some police officers are, of course, very supportive of the concept. They see it as an opportunity to encourage and cultivate a partnership with the community and to work together. And indeed Neighbourhood Watch is a very positive movement and has a great deal to offer, but the down side is that it demands police resources on a scale which some police officers find difficult to justify. The popularity of Neighbourhood Watch in police forces is, therefore, qualified, and needs to be more carefully thought through in achieving a balance between meeting community needs or demands and police resource allocation. In particular, attention needs to be paid to the demands of reactive policing, which although understandable, are not obviously supportive of the longer-term commitment required of community policing, including Neighbourhood Watch.

5. Can or should Neighbourhood Watch be maintained?

There is, as we have seen, broad if low-key public support for Neighbourhood Watch. The 1992 British Crime Survey revealed that 20%, of households were members and that of those who were not 71% would be willing to join (Dowds and Mayhew, 1994). The coordinators of Neighbourhood Watch schemes are often enormously enthusiastic. The public is clearly concerned about crime and members want to minimise personal risks. Many people also wish to demonstrate their backing for the police in their efforts to deal with crime. It is incumbent on the police to provide, as best they are able, a service which meets the wants of the public, and for many this evidently entails servicing Neighbourhood Watch. The police also depend on public support to undertake their work. Whilst the involvement of many individuals belonging to Neighbourhood Watch may be limited, withdrawal by the police of support for Neighbourhood Watch would almost certainly be greeted with dismay by many members of the community. It would symbolise police indifference to public support. It would thus damage police-public relationships. It would certainly fly in the face of police efforts to reinforce partnership with the public. It would risk turning some members of the public away from working with the police towards their own version of community policing - vigilantism - the danger of which has generally been avoided within Neighbourhood Watch.

Notwithstanding some good news about the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Watch from research studies, the discussion in the appendix shows, nevertheless, that it has proved very difficult to demonstrate dependable systematic benefits arising from Neighbourhood Watch. It is, of course, possible that the weaknesses identified in the studies reviewed explains their common failure to find success and there is a case that they have generally not been well conceived. In addition, the proper implementation of schemes has been patchy with, at least in the early years, training and resource material for volunteers virtually non-existent. Too much may have been expected from poorly supported community groups. Yet it would be foolhardy to dismiss the best evidence we have available simply because it is inconvenient. We should also take seriously the possible down-side of Neighbourhood Watch - notably that the police, in accepting their responsibility to meet requests from the low crime areas have consequently fewer resources available for the more pro-active and demanding work in high crime areas. Also, in the very high crime areas (which are rare), Neighbourhood Watch is a particularly difficult concept to introduce; to some sub-groups of the community it is unwelcome and to others it is potentially threatening in its overt involvement of the police with the danger of intimidation which it introduces. In these contexts, some sensitivity is required if crime-related schemes are to be introduced.

Some re-thinking about the nature and direction of the movement is called for in order most effectively to capitalise on its potential, and in particular to ensure that scarce police resourgces devoted to schemes are used to maximum effect and are

concentrated where needs are greatest. There is a real danger that without change more and more police will come to perceive Neighbourhood Watch as a millstone, requiring signs of support merely to keep a smallish but articulate sub-section of the population happy.

In the following section, an alternative vision of Neighbourhood Watch is outlined, which remains true to the spirit of the movement, but approaches its implementation strategically in the hope that its effectiveness and efficiency can be enhanced. The proposed framework focuses in particular on the role of the police, but refers also to what other agencies could do to develop Neighbourhood Watch in a cost-effective way. The key distinguishing feature in determining the police response is the base crime rate of an area. It is proposed that the response to Neighbourhood Watch, its nature and purpose should relate directly to this base crime rate and be dictated by it. As a first step, three crudely defined rates are considered - high, medium and low, which the British Crime Survey associates with differing housing types (Mayhew et al 1993). In relation to the three crime rates and associated housing type the proposed purpose of Neighbourhood Watch, its characteristics and suggested police action are discussed.

Low crime areas (60% of households)

According to the British Crime Survey, the ACORN neighbourhoods characterised by the highest overall crime rates are Types A, K, B, J and C (Mayhew et al, 1993). These are respectively agricultural areas, better off retirement areas, modem family housing in higher incomes, affluent suburban housing and older housing of intermediate status. They are also, as seen, the areas where Neighbourhood Watch is most likely to flourish and is easiest to introduce. Typically its purpose in these areas has been assumed to be related to crime and good police public relations, but of course any attempt to demonstrate a reduction in crime as a consequence of the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch has been bedeviled by the inherently low crime rate to begin with. Nevertheless, because of the attraction of the concept of Neighbourhood Watch and the verbal ability and organisational skills of residents in these areas they have tended to attract police resources into establishing Neighbourhood Watches of their own.

With the inevitability of this in mind, it is possible to look again at the purpose Neighbourhood Watch might serve in areas of this type. Clearly in relation to crime, we might argue that the Neighbourhood Watch scheme should have as one aim the maintenance of the already low crime rate. Given the nature of these areas and the relative lack of burglars living in them, relatively low crime rates should be easily maintained, although it is as well not to forget that their comparative affluence will always render them attractive to the professional burglar.

CAN OR SHOULD NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH BE MAINTAINED?

Neighbourhood Watch schemes are sometimes regarded as difficult to maintain in low crime areas because of the lack of opportunity of feedback in terms of good news. It is impossible, for example, to tell the community that they have reduced the burglary rate which was already low to begin with. Constant messages that crime has not gone up do not make much of a contribution to scheme maintenance; something more positive is generally needed.

A second perfectly presentable and viable aim of schemes in these areas might be to maintain public confidence in the police. Again, this is clearly a maintenance task rather than one of establishing good police public relations because in the vast majority of cases, relations are good to begin with. If healthy police public relations are to be maintained, however, then it is difficult for the police to stop servicing these schemes; they do need to 'show willing' at some level. If, however, areas of this kind are not disproportionately to consume police resources then the resource allocation process has to be managed, in consultation with the community which, after all, 'owns' the scheme.

A further purpose for Neighbourhood Watch schemes in areas of this type might be symbolically to recognise a collective commitment to a set of standards. Neighbourhood Watch activities - phoning the police following an offence, reporting suspicious people, marking property and securing homes - are all probably under way to a relatively greater extent in areas of this kind to begin with. Neighbourhood Watch does no more than effectively provide a formal structure within which these activities can operate. This is nevertheless useful in serving as a public statement of the commitment to crime-free values.

A final purpose for Neighbourhood Watch in areas of this type might be to maintain public confidence in policing and guard against vigilantism which in a context of increasing fear of crime is an ever present danger. As evidence from the British Crime Survey suggests, residents in low crime areas still worry about burglary and it is perhaps in some of these areas where the fear of crime needs to be managed rather more than crime itself. Thus, for example, 15% of residents in affluent suburban areas were very worried about the possibility of being burgled according to the 1992 survey. This is probably a reflection of the fact that they are more likely to have consumable goods worth stealing, although in practice the burglary rates, including attempts in 1991 were only 4%. In agricultural areas where the actual burglary rate including attempts was only 2%, the number of respondents claiming to be very worried about burglary was 14%. The low risks may well be a reflection of the fact that in agricultural areas, there is lower concentration of readily available goods to steal, and access is more of a problem.

If the above paragraphs legitimately explain the purpose of Neighbourhood Watch in housing of this type, what might the characteristics of schemes then be? There

are probably two main aims to be borne in mind, first the need for efficiency and economy and secondly the need for the maintenance of confidence. In relation to maintaining public confidence, it is clear that if requests are made to the police for Neighbourhood Watch, then a positive police response is required; householders cannot simply be ignored because of their low crime rate. The police could, however, encourage relatively large schemes which would have a pay-off in terms of efficiency and would also mean that in covering a wider area, there would occasionally be some crimes to report. The schemes should also be run by community volunteers of whom there are relatively more in low crime areas of middle-class housing. Schemes could also be financially self-sustaining in that householders would be both able and willing to pay a modest amount on a regular basis. The emphasis would be on partnership with the police; other agencies need be minimally involved.

Of course the existence of the Neighbourhood Watch scheme would mean that a structure was in place to facilitate a rapid response to crime should the need arise. The presence of a team of burglars moving into a low crime, but high value property area, might be picked up more quickly and detected more rapidly if a Neighbourhood Watch structure were already in place.

Schemes with characteristics of the kind described would have implications for police action. First, it suggests that the police need only provide what might be called passive support. They would not be expected to encourage the creation of schemes in low crime areas but would certainly have a role to play in supporting them at the request of the community and in the interests of maintaining police public relations and public confidence. The police might take on a role of actively encouraging volunteers and could adopt a 'standard pack' approach to Neighbourhood Watch. The police might also take on the task of providing basic crime data for the area and in this respect the larger the scheme the easier it might be to do so. Finally, they could bear in mind the possibility of mobilising community resources should the need arise when, as noted above, a team of professional burglars or car thieves moves into an area.

Medium crime areas (25% of households)

Areas in the 'medium risk' category are, according to British Crime Survey figures, all council estates other than the poorest and poor quality older terraced housing. All of these areas had burglary rates of 6% (including attempts) in 1991. These figures, although of medium risk, nevertheless led to between 23% and 26% of British Crime Survey respondents claiming to be very worried about domestic burglary. The purpose of Neighhourhood Watch, therefore, might be to reduce the fear of crime and also to reduce crime itself.

A further purpose of Neighbourhood Watch might be to prevent 'tipping' (Wilson and Kelling, 1982). Medium crime estates and in particular the less well-off council estates are at risk of 'tipping' and becoming high crime areas. If this is not to happen then active management by the police and other agencies would he required. The relatively low crime rate in these areas also suggests that the community has already in place values and informal social control mechanisms which maintain public order. A task of the Neighbourhood Watch scheme, therefore, might be more actively to maintain and extend that value system, particularly to younger people on the estate and positively to encourage informal social control. For example, scheme members might monitor incivilities and relatively minor instances of public disorder and ensure that mechanisms are in place to respond rapidly and firmly.

While police public relations in areas of this kind would probably not be characterised as bad, there also may be some scope for improvement and a purpose of Neighbourhood Watch might be to facilitate this process.

Bearing these purposes in mind, the characteristics of schemes in areas of this type would he slightly different from those of low crime areas. First the scheme would be trying to reinforce the characteristics of low crime areas, in other words particularly to reinforce the informal social control which is presumed to operate there. Secondly in terms of the maintenance or support of schemes, fund-raising events and modest subscriptions might he possible, particularly in the better off council estates. There is probably a need for other agencies to he involved, particularly for example in working with the local authority to review housing allocation policies and to ensure that the estates do not deteriorate or 'tip'. Tenants' associations and other community groups would be more likely to pre-exist in these areas which offers the opportunity for joint activities becoming a characteristic of Neighbourhood Watch schemes there. The schemes would need to he able to deal promptly with incivilities and vandalism and new initiatives might need to he established in order to ensure that this was done.

The police could take the lead in engaging other agencies, particularly the local authority in any Neighbourhood Watch schemes or encourage the coordinators to do so. They should also, of course, provide appropriate data on crime. The police should actively encourage schemes on 'at risk' estates which are characteristically the poorer council housing areas, or areas where the local authority feel there are particular vulnerabilities. Sometimes, local authority refurbishment schemes and the like can act as a catalyst for community action and the police could take advantage of the presence of such schemes to encourage the later development of crime-related initiatives, including Neighbourhood Watch.

It is important that the police consider responding promptly to emerging crime problems oven of a relatively minor nature in these areas in order to maintain

control over incivilities and vandalism with an active crime prevention contribution from home heat officers or specialists from the police service, such as crime prevention officers.

High crime areas (13% of households)

According to the British Crime Survey, high risk areas comprise the poorest council estates where burglary rates of 12% were recorded in 1991, multi-racial areas with 11% of homes victimised, and high status non-family areas -typically 'gentrified' areas in inner cities with a 9% burglary rate. Residents in the first two of these areas had the highest percentage very worried about burglary, 28% in multi-racial areas and 38% in the poorest council areas.

The purpose and characteristics of Neighbourhood Watch should be different on the high crime local authority housing estates from the high status housing in the inner city. Taking high crime local authority housing first, a clear purpose of Neighbourhood Watch might he to reduce crime from its unacceptably high level. In doing this, the Neighbourhood Watch schemes should aim to increase community control and to decrease community tolerance of crime and incivilities. One of the differences between high crime and low crime areas seems to he the tolerance of offending with low crime residents less prepared to tolerate crime and incivility in comparison with residents of typically higher crime areas. Before people can be expected to take control in this way, however, they need to have confidence in the support of the local agencies, particularly the local authority and the police. This will require sustained and tangible commitment at all levels (Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994 (a) and (b)).

Also in the local authority housing high crime areas, there is a need to widen and deepen public confidence in policing. For a variety of reasons in these areas, public relations with the police are likely to he damaged. For those residents with some police sympathy, this needs to be deepened and reinforced while there is a case for widening police public confidence, particularly in multi-racial areas where the ethnic minority communities are relatively more inclined to see shortcomings in police hehaviour and in their responses to problems.

The characteristics of schemes intended to support these aims would be very different from those in low crime areas. First there is a very clear need for a multi-agency initiative with, for example, telephone companies subsidising coordinators access to telephones, significant local authority involvement and probation service input. Strong community coordinators would be needed with local support groups in place for them. One of the great difficulties of generating Neighbourhood Watch schemes in areas of this kind is the vulnerable position that coordinators find themselves in and the serious danger of alienating themselves from parts of the

community, particularly those aggressive neighbours who might take a very dim view Of police public Cooperation. Schemes in areas of this kind would, therefore, need to be particularly small to enable support to be instant and very visible. This would also facilitate the development of active support mechanisms for victims and witnesses of crime, perhaps working particularly closely with Victim Support, aimed at encouraging them to come forward and supporting them through any subsequent court appearances.

It is also likely to be the case in areas of this kind that younger residents of the estates would be heavily involved in offending. Ways need to be developed, possibly within the context of Neighbourhood Watch, to involve young people in their communities. There may be a case, for example, for establishing out-reach workers, youth provision, wheels projects etc, all of which could he linked to a Neighbourhood Watch movement. In some of the worst local authority housing areas, there are no existing community groups or tenant associations with which to work. It may be possible in such areas for a Neighbourhood Watch scheme to lead in the establishment of a wider community-base and consultation process, although characteristically, the process is the other way around with more generalised community action leading to the establishment of Neighbourhood Watch.

In terms of police action, these areas provide the greatest challenge. First, the police Would need actively to encourage the support of schemes and this would require considerable innovation and ingenuity on their part. It may be necessary, for example, to talk of community care programmes rather than'Neighbourhood Watch' and agencies other than the police may need to take the initiative (Webb and Tilley, 1994). Whatever the label attached to the crime management groups in areas of this kind, the activities need to be tailor-made to reflect local circumstances. Police need to be able to engage with other agencies in the work or to encourage other agencies to take the lead in setting up local groups where necessary - multi-agency action is the key.

Clearly again, information on crime rates needs to be provided by the police, but it might be particularly important in areas of this kind to feed back successes as regularly as possible. The police may find that they need to establish a rapid response policy on anything associated with intimidation and would need to establish a clear policy of active support for victims and witnesses. The specialist architectural liaison officer might be encouraged to work with the local authority in contributing to estate refurbishment work and in advising (in security and other improvements.

Turning now to inner city high status housing, which is also characteristically associated with relatively high burglary rates, there would clearly be a need to reduce crime, but also to increase public confidence that crime could be controlled and that

the police were taking appropriate action. One purpose of the Neighbourhood Watch schemes might be to maintain the attractiveness of the inner city to higher income groups as a matter of social policy.

The schemes themselves might be characterised by being self-financing and coordinator-led. Schemes should be small with a strong emphasis on Neighbourhood Watch signs at street and house level. Good police public communication would need to be in place with a rapid response available in relation to burglaries in progress. Residents might be encouraged to help each other to reduce risk and in particular to watch out at holiday times and other high risk periods. The installation of burglar alarms might be particularly appropriate in areas of this kind.

As far as police action is concerned they might of course actively support the establishment of schemes and offer domestic security surveys to householders (perhaps using special constables trained for the purpose). Again, crime information would need to be provided by the police and some sort of support or coordination of financial arrangements might also be appropriate. Newsletters provided for those in areas of this type could probably be supported significantly by the local residents.

All of these proposals, in relation to the operation of Neighbourhood Watch in high, medium and low crime areas, are summarised in Figure I.

Repeat victimisation

Finally, and this applies to both the poorer local authority housing and the gentrified inner-city areas, repeat, victimisation is likely to be a feature of the crime profile (Farrell and Pease, 1993; National Crime Prevention Board, 1994). In high crime areas, more so than others, the chance of being burgled on a second or subsequent occasion is greater than it would he if the first burglary had not happened. Knowing this, and also knowing that the second offence is likely to happen relatively quickly after the first, is important information for Neighbourhood Watch coordinators and members, and could easily form the centre-piece of a neighbourhood strategy in such areas.

This section has gone into some detail about the purpose, characteristics, and police action associated with Neighbourhood Watch in different types of crime area. The suggestions summarised in Figure 1 illustrate the range of purposes, characteristics and police action associated with the different crime levels. There is a great deal of room for manoeuvre within areas even if the purposes of Neighbourhood Watch were to be accepted as appropriate. The intention of this section is primarily to set a loose framework or structure within which Neighbourhood Watch can he conceptualised and further developed.

Figure 1: Policing Neighbourhood Watch: strategic framework

Crime Level	Goals	Characteristics	Level of police involvement
Low	Keep crime rate low Maintain public confidence Guard against vigilantes Maintain good police/public relations Reduce fear of crime	Run by community volunteers Capable of self funding Respond rapidly should need arise Emphasis on partnership with the police Minimal involvement from other agencies NW signs displayed	Support by request Encourage volunteers 'Standard pack' NW Provide basic crime data Request help from community when need arises
Medium	Reduce crime rate Maintain and extend crime free value system Increase informal social control Monitor and resond to minor nuisance and incivilities Improve police/public relations Reduce fear of crime	Reinforce characteristics of low crime areas Fund-raising events and modest subscription Other agencies involved, eg. work with local authority High profile activities with tenants' associations and community groups Able to deal promptly with incivilities/vandalism	Engage other agencies Provide crime data Active encouragement for schemes on 'at risk' estates Respond promptly to emerging crime problems Active CPO contribution
High	*Local authority housing* Reduce crime Increase community control Decrease tolerance of crime/ incivilities Widen and deepen public confidence in policing Reduce fear of crime	Multi-agency support, eg BT phones, local authority involvement, probation service input Strong communith coordinators with local support groups in place Small schemes Active support for victims/witnesses Active involvement of young people in crime control	Active encouragement of schemes/innovation 'Tailor-made' schemes to reflect local circumstances Immediate feedback of successes Engage other agencies Rapid response policy on intimidation ALO work with local authority Provide detailed crime data
	Gentrified areas Reduce crime Increase public confidence Maintain attractiveness of inner city to higher income groups Reduce fear of crime	Self-financing Small schemes NW signs displayed Good police/public communications - rapid response Encourage residents to help each other to reduce risks Encourage installation of burglar alarms	Active encouragement of schemes Domestic security surveys offered Provide detailed crime data

6. What next?

This report has attempted to illustrate the enormous popularity of Neighbourhood Watch whilst noting its mixed results in crime prevention terms. In many of the areas in which it has been introduced, crime rates have always been relatively low and Neighbourhood Watch is no more than a formalisation of the ongoing processes of support to the police from the community. In these already low crime areas, it adds relatively little in preventive terms, but certainly reinforces community values and good police public relations, and increases public awareness of crime issues.

Although much more difficult to establish in high crime areas, initiatives of the Neighbourhood Watch variety have met with more success in preventive terms. To be successful, however, they need to he planned and introduced with sensitivity to the community dynamics.

The structure within which Neighbourhood Watch might he developed, and which was described in the previous section, sets out new goals and characteristics for schemes dependent upon the base crime rates in the area. There is a great deal of scope for variation within that structure, but the essential point is that the introduction and maintenance of Neighbourhood Watch in an area should pay due regard to what can reasonably be expected to be achieved in crime control terms, and the extent to which police and ether agencies should be providing resources. Neighbourhood Watch can no longer be simply demand-led.

Appendix

The effectiveness of Neighbourhood Watch: a review of the published literature

Whilst 'Does it work?' may seem the obvious question to ask about Neighbourhood Watch, baldly stated it is liable to produce unhelpful and misleading answers. First, without some idea of its ends there can be no criteria against which to determine whether or not Neighbourhood Watch works. Second, if, as it must, 'working' is taken to mean effecting some kind of change, it is necessary to know about the conditions prior to the formation of Neighbourhood Watch to discover if it makes any difference. This means not only having a 'before' measure of the attributes Neighbourhood Watch is intended to change, but also a grasp of the circumstances within which it is introduced. Clearly social conditions vary widely and whilst Neighbourhood Watches have been formed in many differing types of community, those in which they have tended to flourish are rather particular (see pp 4-6). Third, what is meant by Neighbourhood Watch has changed (see pp 2-3), and what is included has been very variable.

Instead of enquiring 'Does- it-work?', it makes more sense to ask, 'How and under what conditions can Neighbourhood Watch maximise intended and positive outcomes, and minimise negative ones?' This both reflects the diversity of practice and condition and also helps focus discussion of policy implications, since in addition to informing arguments about whether or not support for the movement is worthwhile, it also invites consideration of how and where potential benefits can most effectively and economically be gained. It is to this that the arguments in the main body of the text are directed.

This review begins by taking Neighbourhood Watch as a *crime prevention and detection* measure, looking at the effectiveness of it as a complete package and then at its constituent parts. It goes on to consider the evidence for other intended positive outcomes which Neighbourhood Watch might bring about, including reduction in the fear of crime; improvement in police/public relations; informal victim support; and community development. Finally, a short section considers negative unintended consequences which, it has been suggested, may under certain circumstances be associated with Neighbourhood Watch.

Where results appear disappointing, following Rosenbaum (1986) an attempt is made to distinguish between theory failure, implementation failure and measurement failure. These refer respectively to weaknesses in the assumptions concerning how and where interventions can have the expected effect, to lack of success in putting in place measures which if applied could then produce the desired consequence, and to shortcomings in methods of assessing success.

APPENDIX

i) Neighbourhood Watch as a crime prevention/detection measure

The effectiveness of the package

It is important to recognise at the outset that what is done within Neighbourhood Watch schemes which might reduce crime varies considerably. Husain (1988), in a study based on a mail questionnaire sent to a sample of local Neighbourhood Watch coordinators, found that window stickers are very commonly used- in 71% of schemes, more than three quarters of the households had put them up. However, in over a third of schemes (36%) fewer than a quarter of households had marked their property. Home security surveys were even less common: in over two thirds of the schemes less than a quarter of the households had taken advantage of them. Husain comments that estimating changes in the vigilance of households is difficult and he does not attempt to do so. Clearly, what passes for Neighbourhood Watch in practice is not by any means constant. Thus both conception and implemented practice vary widely.

Moreover, we should acknowledge that non-members may also employ the crime prevention measures forming elements of the Neighbourhood Watch package. Table A1 gives data from the 1988 and 1992 British Crime Surveys in England and Wales, which found that security surveys, bicycle marking and property marking were more common amongst members of Neighbourhood Watch than non members, though rates were still not high.

Table Al: Security precautions by members and non-members of Neighbourhood. Watch (British Crime Survey)

	NW members		Non-members	
	1988	1992	1988	1992
Had security surveys	10%	11%	4%	4%
Marked hicycles	16%	15%	9%	9%
Marked household property	33%	31%	12%	13%

Source: Dowds and Mayhew, 1994

It is also noted that many members had taken these security measures before joining, and the same crime awareness prompting adoption of security measures presumably also led to membership of Neighbourhood Watch (Mayhew et al 1989, Dowds and Mayllew, 1994).

Given the variability in measures introduced with Neighbourhood Watch and the diversity of contexts for their implementation (see pp 2-6), efforts to evaluate

Neighbourhood Watch as a standard package of activities are problematic. If any individual example is examined results will not necessarily be valid elsewhere, since the same package may not be received in like manner in another community. Moreover, what is included will itself differ from place to place. The 'natural' short term volatility of local crime rates also makes isolation of the effects of a particular measure in any small area very difficult. If, on the other hand, the experience of many packages is aggregated this will gloss over potentially significant package and community differences leading to variations in outcome. What works where will be indecipherable.

Brown (1992) concludes that, 'few, if any, studies meet all the criteria for a rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Watch in reducing crime.' Characteristic weaknesses of many examinations of Neighbourhood Watch have been detailed not only by Brown (1992), but also by Bennett (1990), Husain (1990) and Rosenbaum (1987). Rosenbaum (1987,1988) has reviewed the evidence from the United States. In a damning indictment of most so-called evaluations, he concludes that they are, 'characterised by weak designs, an under-use of statistical significance tests, a poor conceptualisation and definition of treatments, the absence of a valid and reliable measurement of programme implementation and outcomes, and a consistent failure to address competing explanations for observed effects' (Rosenbaum 1988). He finally identified only two satisfactory evaluations. The first, in Seattle, revealed reductions in burglary rates and in fear of crime in experimental (Neighbourhood Watch) areas compared to those used as controls. The other, in Chicago, again comparing experimental and control areas, concluded that crime was not reduced and that fear was increased with Neighbourhood Watch, even though implementation had been as effective as possible.

Neighbourhood Watch in Britain has been subject to rather little systematic evaluation in spite of its extra-ordinary growth. Many studies share the typical weaknesses identified by Rosenbaum. We concentrate here mainly on the small number of relatively rigorous published social scientific evaluations of British Ncighbourhixxl Witch, though as we shall see even these are not without their shortcomings.

The studies looked at differ in method and in limitation. For example, the most detailed, quasi-experimental impact study was conducted very early in the history of Neighbourhood Watch (1985-6) but looked at only two areas (Bennett 1990). The broadest coverage is provided through an analysis of the 1988 British Crime Survey, **but only** a few questions were asked specifically about Neighbourhood Watch, and obviously no before and after comparisons were possible. Perhaps the most promising study is by Husain (1990) who takes a large number of hopeful looking Neighbourhood Watch areas and tries to compare the crime rates before and after

APPENDIX

the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch, but he has to depend solely on recorded crime data and lacks information on what was delivered within the Neighbourhood Watch packages. Each of these studies adopts an almost exclusively statistical approach. They do not adequately tap the experience and understandings of Neighbourhood Watch amongst those within or without scheme areas. A qualitative approach is adopted by McConville and Shepherd (1992). However, this contains neither before nor after data on actual crime rates either through victim surveys or through rewarded crime figures. A demonstration project implementing 'cocoon' Home Watch, mini-schemes originally including no more than about half a dozen households, formed part of the Kirkholt Burglary Prevention Project (Forrester et al 1988, 1990), though here it was part of a package and the separate effects of it are impossible to disentangle.

Collectively the studies referred to below add up to only a fairly superficial answer to the key question we have identified, that of how and under what conditions Neighbourhood Watch can maximise positive and minimise negative outcomes. As we shall see, however, they do suggest that some hard thinking is needed about more strategic approaches to getting the most out of the movement.

A case study approach is adopted by Bennett (1990) in looking at Neighbourhood Watch in London. This is by far the most elaborate Neighbourhood Watch evaluation to date. Given that, 'the primary aim of Neighbourhood Watch in London is to reduce crime', Bennett focuses on this. He also looks at the effect on fear of crime. Bennett took two areas (in Acton and Wimbledon) in which Neighbourhood Watch was to be introduced (the experimental areas) and one (in Redbridge) in which this was not to occur (the control area) and conducted a detailed 'quasi-experimental' study comparing the respective before and after crime and fear of crime patterns as revealed in victim surveys. A 'displacement area' adjoining the Wimbledon experimental site was also included in the study. Other data on costs, calls to the police, police views, Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinator views and written rewards were also collected. The areas selected were well bounded and large enough to generate a measurable effect. In addition they were thought to he conducive to the successful establishment of schemes because residents' surveillance would be practicable, because potential co-ordinators seemed to be able and enthusiastic enough to make the schemes work, and because the local police were supportive. The experimental areas were similar in ACORN terms (that is they had a similar social and physical composition), and the control area in which Neighburhoood Watch neither already existed nor was planned was selected to match the experimental areas as closely as possible.

The proposed schemes included surveillance, property marking, home security surveys, signs and window stickers indicating members' participation. The level of measured

activity was significantly higher in Acton than Wimbledon, in terms of numbers of meetings, newsletters, additional activities, and local residents' involvement.

As Table A2 indicates, Bennett did not find consistent improvements in recorded crime rates in the experimental Neighbourhood Watch areas compared to the control or displacement areas.

Table A2: Changes in recorded crime in the years before and after the introduction of NW (Bennett 1990)

	All offences	Burglary
Acton experimental area	+40%	-8%
Wimbledon experimental area	-17%	-35%
Redbridge control area	-39%	-33%
Wimbledon displacement area	-9%	-20%

The results of the before and after victim surveys are no better, as indicated in Table A3. For neither household nor personal offences were there markedly better results in the Neighbourhood Watch areas than in the control or displacement areas.

Table A3: Rates of household and personal offences as revealed in victim surveys covering one year before and one year after introduction of Neighbourhood Watch (Bennett 1990)

	Household offences		Personal offences	
	Year before	Year after	Year before	Year after
Acton experimental	17%	26%	1%	5%
Wimbledon experimental	20%	23%	2%	2%
Redbridge control	15%	11%	1%	2%
Wimbledon displacement	23%	25%	4%	3%

Note: *'Household offences' include theft of motor vehicle, theft from motorvehicle, bicycle theft, burglary, theft dwelling, other household theft and criminal damage. 'Personal offences' include assault, theft from person, robbery, sexual offences and threats.*

Within Bennett's experimental areas the mean household offence rate per household was slightly higher for scheme participants than non-participants. In the Acton experimental areas the figure for participants is 0.44 and for non participants 0.41. In the Wimbledon experimental areas the corresponding figures are 0.47 and 0.40.

Though, according to Bennett, 'The detection of crime is not presented in the policy literature as a primary aim of Neighbourhood Watch' (p.92) he looked for any effect on this. In the subdivision including the experimental area in Acton, the detection rate went down overall from 7.1% to 5.7% and from 8.3% to 5.7% in the subdivision covering the Wimbledon experimental area. For burglary the corresponding figures are 7.1 % down to 4.4% for Acton and HI % down to 6.3% for Wimbledon. There was, thus, no evidence that detection rates improved with the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch.

Why were the results produced by Bennett's study so disappointing? Was it a measurement failure, shortcomings in the theory, or a weakness in the implementation of Neighbourhood Watch? With regard to measurement, there are weaknesses in the methods employed, which makes interpretation of findings difficult (Pawson & Tilley 1994). Areas cannot be treated as 'controls' in the way Redbridge was used in this study. Areas change continuously under the influence of a host of internal and external causes. They are never either inert or merely self reproducing. Redbridge, therefore, does not make sense as a benchmark.

In relation to theory, it is difficult to be optimistic about the ideas behind Neighbourhood Watch as conceived in London at the time of the study. Mere watching and reporting, as Bennett points out, do not necessarily reduce offending behaviour, nor does attendance at meetings dealing with local crime issues. Moreover, Bennett notes that high rates of non-occupancy during the day, a high turnover of residents, and the normal presence of strangers would all impede the identification of suspicious activity. Neighbourhood Watch's combination of elements of both siticitional crime prevention ('opportunity reduction') and social crime prevention (informal social control), Bennett tells us, 'makes it unclear exactly how Neighbourhood Watch is supposed to work', and hence what should be done which couhl be expected to effect the hoped-for outcomes.

Turning finally to implementation, only a very dilute version of Neighbourhood Watch lvas put in place, 'which tailed to instigate fully the mechanisms implicit in the theoretical formulation', though Bennett believes his schemes to be good examples of Neighbourhood Watch as then conceived and delivered by the Metropolitan Police. Low dosage schemes were introduced following from an emphasis on quantity rather than quality. Bennett states that crime prevention officers lacked the resources to promote property marking at campaign level. They could do little more than tell residents where they could obtain marking pens.

CPOs were also limited in the number of domestic security surveys they could conduct - just 3% and 5% were undertaken in the two Neighbourhood Watch areas examined. Only encouragement to watch is left. This amounts to very partial implementation of what Neighbourhood Watch might be. Bennett also expresses surprise that creating signs that dwellings are occupied was not built into Neighbourhood Watch. Such signs of occupancy seem to be an important cue for burglars. Moreover, they had been part of the Seattle programme on which Neighbourhood Watch in the Metropolitan Police District was based.

A rather different form of evaluation from Bennett's, though no more encouraging in its results, is that by McConville and Shepherd (1992). In a small scale study covering three police areas - Avon and Somerset, the Metropolitan Police and Gwent - 226 residents aged over 16 were interviewed. Respondents were selected from 12 sites where Neighbourhood Watch operated and ten where it did not, yielding on average about ten respondents per site. Each site covered 60 to 100 homes.

McConville and Shepherd do not provide any hard data on success or otherwise from crime surveys or patterns of reported or recorded crime. They look instead to the subjective impressions of respondents. They found that fewer than 10% of residents believed that Neighhourhood Watch had been a success in their area as a crime prevention measure. These respondents' grounds for viewing Neighhourhood Watch as a success turned on information provided to them in the local Neighhourhood Watch newsletter. The vast majority, who did not think Neighbourhood Watch had been effective, came to that view either because of local increases in crime or because crime had not been eliminated. The authors note, as we have seen (pp 4-6), that Neighbourhood Watch has been established much more readily in middle class areas in which there is already a relatively low crime rate. The scope here for crime reduction is, of course, rather limited. The lack of apparent impact is used to explain the rapid loss of impetus of most schemes. It is also pointed out, however, that most residents do not join with high expectations in the first place. They lack deep commitment to their watches. Theirs is a very low level participation.

Husain (1990), like McConville and Shepherd, looks at areas both with and without Neighbourhood Watch, but unlike them bases his analysis on recorded crime rates rather than on the views of residents. Husain identified six areas in which Neighbourhood Watch was established and took nearby control areas where it had not been put in place to compare their recorded crime patterns. The Neighbourhood Watch areas included over 550 schemes and a population of 25,700. Husain's areas were chosen in part because of the availability of data suitable for his analytic purposes and in part following enquiries of the local police as to which schemes they

considered good examples of Neighbourhood Watch. This was not, therefore, a random sample of schemes. It was designed to find success. The crime categories examined by Husain included first, burglary in a dwelling with loss, which is identified as the crime with whose reduction Neighbourhood Watch is most concerned, but also, where possible, unauthorised taking and driving away of a vehicle (TADA) and theft from a motor vehicle (TFMV).

The first area, in Birmingham, is described as 'a high-status residential neighbourhood', with a 'strong and active Residents Association.' It adjoins an 'inner city multi-ethnic area.' The Neighbourhood Watch schemes have thirty volunteer co-ordinators, with two thirds of the households participating. The area enjoyed a low crime rate prior to the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch. The schemes cover 7,000 households. Husain could discern no beneficial effect on any category of crime examined.

The second area, in Brighton, is again 'a high-status residential area', where crime rates were low prior to the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch. Twenty-one non-contiguous schemes covered 1,500 households. Only burglary could be included in the study, because there was too little motor vehicle related crime for analysis. The area including the Neighbourhood Watch schemes experienced an upward trend in burglary following the main phase of Neighbourhood Watch expansion, though this was less than in the control area. Husain also finds lower risks of burglary within the Neighbourhood Watch covered patches than in the rest of the area.

The third area, in Burnley, comprises small terraced houses, 'with a high concentration of skilled and semi-skilled manual workers.' There is a mixture of owner-occupied and privately rented accommodation. At about 5% per annum recorded burglary was at a higher rate than the national average (about 2%), but other crime categories had a much lower incidence. A single scheme covered 1,000 households. Again, only burglary is examined. Husain concludes that there is little in the (fluctuating) figures for burglary to suggest that Neighbourhood Watch has reduced its incidence.

Much of the fourth and largest area, in Manchester, is 'made up of old, terraced, sub-divided and privately rented' housing, with 'an above average residential turnover.' 'Wage-earners tend to be in semi-skilled or unskilled occupations which are poorly paid. Unemployment is relatively high.' The population is cosmopolitan. The large area also includes local authority and owner-occupied housing. The rate of crime had been high - in the inner-city zone it had reached an annual rate of more than one in six households. There were 517 schemes covering 11,000 households in all. ' Almost 95% of the schemes were formed in a seven month period. 80% of the area had been covered by the fifth of these seven months. Though there is no clear break with the rapid increase in numbers of Neighbourhood Watch schemes, their growth

is associated with some reduction in burglary both absolutely and relative to the local control area. Husain is unable to say with absolute confidence that the relationship is a causal one. TADA follows a broadly similar pattern to burglary. The patterns for TFMV do not give rise to the same degree of optimism that Neighbourhood Watch may be having a beneficial effect.

The fifth area, in Preston, comprises 'two large local authority housing developments', which are said to have deteriorated in recent years. Few residents had bought their homes. There was little social cohesion. Most workers were in poorly paid semi-skilled or unskilled manual jobs, and the rate of unemployment was high. Only burglary rates were looked at. The rate had been one in nine households in 1985. Two schemes covered 3,600 households. Here, both absolutely and compared to the control area there was a substantial fall. In the fifteen months following introduction of the schemes there were 71 fewer burglaries than expected, a fall of 28%. Since the control area was adjacent to the scheme area, Husain notes that there may have been some displacement.

Finally the sixth area, in Sutton Coldfield, comprised detached and semi-detached owner occupied houses, with high property values. A high proportion of residents were in professional or managerial occupations, most living in families though there were some pensioners also. The level of crime was low. Neighbourhood Watch included 3,600 households within 11 non-contiguous schemes formed over a nineteen month period. There is little in the data analysed to suggest that Neighbourhood Watch has brought about a reduction in burglary, TADA or TFMV

Whilst Husain's study includes descriptions of the areas covered it does not consider what was done within the Neighbourhood Watch schemes. It is therefore difficult to gauge what it is about Neighbourhood Watch which led to the positive outcomes which may have been brought about in some areas. Also his use of control areas as a benchmark against which to measure effects has the same weakness as Bennett's. Nevertheless, Husain's finding that in some high crime areas the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch was associated with falls in crime is encouraging. It gives grounds for believing that Neighbourhood Watch can and sometimes does have an impact on crime.

Residents' attitudes to Neighbourhood Watch in three schemes in Scotland were examined by the Scottish Home and Health Department using a postal questionnaire (Payne, 1989). Easter Drylaw, in Edinburgh, comprises 280 dwellings, all of which were originally council owned. There are semi-detached houses and flats in units of four and six. Of the three areas, Easter Drylaw had the highest proportion of over sixty year olds and the lowest rate of motor vehicle ownership. Craigleith, also in Edinburgh, comprises about 500 homes in all. It is entirely owner-occupied, made up of semi detached and a few detached houses together with a small recent

development of semi-detached and terraced houses. It has the highest rate of car ownership. Tanshall/Caskieberran, at the eastern end of Glenrothes, is mostly local authority owned with a small pocket of about 70 privately developed owner-occupied houses amongst the total of some 2,000. Tanshall/Caskieberran had the lowest proportion of over sixty year olds. All areas had fairly high residential stability.

There were patterned differences to the way Neighbourhood Watch functioned in the three areas, and in residents' judgements as to its effectiveness, as revealed in Table A4. According to responses to most questions, those from Craigleith had a higher level of activity, were more satisfied with it as a response to crime, were most happy with the support received from the police and most commonly believed crime to have fallen because of Neighbourhood Watch.

Table A4: Neighbourhood Watch in three areas in Scotland

	Craigleith	Drylaw	Tanshall/ Caskieberran
Attended NW meeting in previous year	44%	19%	20%
Had marked possession	59%	34%	34%
Had home security survey	45%	27%	4%
Believed crime to he falling hecause of NW	50%	29%	36%
Believed neighbourhood softer because of NW	42%	21%	22%
Satisfied with police support	65%	**44%**	**40%**

In all areas vehicle owners were generally more likely to have taken house-related crime prevention measures than others. The study did not include victimisation questions and no recorded crime data are given. What it does suggest however is that Craigleith, the better off community (as indicated by tenure patterns), operated a more active Neighbourhood Watch. Also, residents of Craigleith were subjectively most optimistic about its effectiveness. Finally, the better off within the community (as indicated by vehicle ownership) took more advantage of those elements of Neighbourhood Watch which might reduce risks to them, though why this is the case cannot be gauged from the Study.

The Scottish study, like that by McConville and Shepherd, looked at subjective impressions of Neighbourhood Watch. Its findings are rather more positive. The data, though, are not entirely comparable since the studies were undertaken in

different ways. There are few statistics regarding McConville and Shepherd's small sample, though the data from the individuals spoken to is rich in detail. The Scottish study was much larger (over 1,000 respondents in all) and was subjected to statistical analysis though the meaning of the answers was not nor could be explored.

The British Crime Survey of 1988 addressed the issue of Neighbourhood Watch effectiveness in its survey of a randomly selected sample of just over 10,000 respondents in England and Wales (Mayhew et al 1989). The results relating to effects on burglary are equivocal. First, a matched sample of householders found no significant difference in rates of victimisation between members (5%) and non-members (4%); second, whilst overall both members and non-members experienced a burglary rate of 3% in 1987, taking the previous five years (1982-1986) 12% of members but only 8% of non-members had been burgled; third, it is pointed out that this apparent reduction may reflect wholly or partly the impact experience of burglary or a locally high rate may have had on setting up or joining schemes.

Cocoon Neighbourhood Watch was actively promoted as part of the Kirkholt Burglary Prevention Project (Forrester et al 1988,1990; Forrester 1990). Here Neighbourhood Watch was not so much delivered as a package in itself as one element in an overall package with a major focus on reducing the risks of multiple victimisation from burglary (Farrell and Pease, 1993). Thus, the introduction and promotion of Neighbourhood Watch complemented a range of other separately delivered measures, including removal of prepayment cash meters, security surveys of victimised dwellings and those of neighbours, target hardening victimised properties and postcoding property. Ninety cocoons were established, 88% of residents showing an interest in participating. The effects of the Kirkholt Burglary Prevention Project as a whole were dramatic. From a 25% annual burglary rate in 1986-7 it fell to 6% in 1989-90. It is not possible to separate out the particular contribution of Neighbourhood Watch to this outcome.

Overall the results of studies of Neighbourhood Watch as a package are mixed. Husain (1990), looking at what were deemed good schemes found some effect in schemes in high crime areas, but attributing cause to Neighbourhood Watch itself was problematic. Payne (1989) revealed widespread beliefs that Neighbourhood Watch had helped reduce crime, especially on the most active scheme considered, though there were no hard data on rates of victimisation. In Kirkholt cocoon Neighbourhood Watch as part of a wider local strategy to reduce burglary was associated with a dramatic fall in rates. Elsewhere disappointingly little evidence was found to suggest that Neighbourhood Watch had acted as an effective crime prevention measure. It must be borne in mond, however, that given the tendency for Neighbourhood Watch to be established more easilly in low crime areas marked effects are unlikely. In addition, the implementation of activities associated with

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Neighbourhood Watch is uneven, but generally at a low level. Where it has been implemented vigorously (helped by workers on the ground), alongside other crime prevention measures in a high burglary area, as happened in Kirkholt, much more marked effects were found. It should be acknowledged also, as indicated above, that none of the studies examined was without methodological weaknesses. What can be said with some certainty, though perhaps unsurprisingly, is that the mere establishment of Neighbourhood Watch cannot be expected automatically to lead to crime reduction.

The effectiveness of the elements of Neighbourhood Watch

Security Surveys: There are three aspects to the effectiveness of security surveys. The first has to do with the rate at which they are offered and taken up. The second has to do with the implementation of recommendations resulting from surveys. The third has to do with the effectiveness of those measures which are implemented.

The unevenness of the rate at which security surveys have been undertaken within Neighbourhood Watches has already been mentioned. This does not mean that security surveys are not more common in Neighbourhood Watch areas than elsewhere. Indeed, the British Crime Survey in Scotland, consistent with findings for England and Wales, found that whilst 12% of households inside Neighbourhood Watch areas had had security surveys, only 5% outside had (Allen and Payne 1991). Within Neighbourhood Watch areas, however, there was negligible difference between members and non-members, with 10% and 11% respectively having had security surveys. Neighbourhood Watch has clearly not succeeded in implementing wide-spread security surveys.

Security surveys on their own, of course, cannot inhibit burglary. What may have an effect is the action taken following them. In a study within the Surrey Constabulary, where 98% of those asking for security survey were owner occupiers, Laycock (1989) found that, at 50%, advice in relation to window security was most likely to be implemented in full. At 14%, the least likely recommendations to be fully implemented were in relation to perimeter security. Thus, even amongst the presumably well to do owner occupiers in Surrey, only partial action was typically taken on the advice proffered following a security survey. Recent victims were found most likely to accept the recommendations.

It has been found that burgled properties tend to be insecure, and that well targeted programmes upgrading security can have an impact on risks of victimisation (Forrester et al 1988, Tilley & Webb 1994). There is also evidence that houses with more security tend to experience lower levels of burglary (Mayhew et al 1993). Studies have concluded, as well, that where advice from Crime Prevention Officers is implemented risks of burglary are reduced (Laycock 1985a, Tilley & Webb 1994)

However, though target hardening of individual properties may he found to reduce their vulnerability the effects on burglary of upgrading the security of properties in whole areas has been disappointing (Allatt 1984).

Property marking: There is nothing about property marking which intrinsically reduces vulnerability to theft. Its effectiveness turns on its success in persuading prospective offenders that risks to them will increase and/or disposal of goods will be more difficult. In either case they are being convinced that the benefit-risk equation is altered in such a way that they are deterred from the offence.

Laycock (1985b, 1992) shows that with a sufficiently high take-up rate (in her study some 70%), alongside extensive publicity, burglary rates can be seriously dented, though the effect wears off with time suggesting that periodic injections of publicity will be a necessary condition to sustain the impact.

We have seen that there are rather higher rates of property marking amongst Neighbourhood Watch members than non-members, though these rarely reach the rate achieved in Laycock's Study (Kirkholt is an exception, with a rate of 70%). It may also be that cautiousness both prompts participation in Neighbourhood Watch and independently leads members to mark their property more commonly than non-members.

Surveillance: It is not entirely clear how simple watching is expected to reduce crime. It could be that because prospective offenders try to avoid being seen (Bennett and Wright, 1984), they are deterred from committing their crimes in the belief that vigilant members of the public (perhaps made so through Neighbourhood Watch) will be more likely to see and report suspicious activities to the police. Alternatively it could be that deliberate surveillance actually leads to the apprehension of criminals, since the public is the major source of information for the police in clearing crimes (Clarke & Hough, 1 980, 1984).

Comparing seven months before with the equivalent seven months after the launch of Neighbourhood Watch, Bennett (1990) found a reduction in the total number of telephone calls from the public in both his experimental areas (by 3% in Acton and by 26% in Wimbledon). There was no significant increase in reports of suspicious activities in either area, station messages decreasing by 24% in Acton and by 17% in Wimbledon, and emergency calls decreasing by 64% in Wimbledon. The only increase was in emergency calls reporting suspiciousness in Acton - from a total of 5 to 8 in all.

Mayhew et al (1989) report that whilst 18% of Neighbourhood Watch member respondents to the 1988 British Crime Survey reported seeing something they thought might be a crime or might lead to a crime being committed a very slightly

lower proportion of non-member respondents did so (16%). This is not statistically significant. However, of those who had seen something they considered suspicious 45% of a matched sample of Neighbourhood Watch respondents told the police whilst only 31% of non-members did so. Moreover, the Neighbourhood Watch members were much more likely to interpret what they observed as a burglary. Similar, though slightly reduced differences between members and non-members were found in the 1992 British Crime Survey (Dowds and Mayhew, 1994).

As part of their study McConville and Shepherd (1992) interviewed not only residents but also all available dedicated community beat officers in each research site and a parallel cross section sample of relief officers, a total of over 200 police officers in all. Their conclusions, from a qualitative analysis of the data collected from residents and those in the police, were that:

a) many residents, either because of tenuous links with the neighbourhood or because they live in the back of their houses, see or hear and pass on little they would judge to be suspicious,

b) the lack of a telephone inhibited potential reports of suspicious incidents from poorer members of the community,

c) the public are apt to have a different construction of suspiciousness from the police - in particular they are more reluctant than the police on the basis of simple stereotypes to conclude that what or who they see is suspicious,

d) many members of the public are prepared to put up with some forms and levels of deviance on the grounds that we live in a plural society,

e) even without Neighbourhood Watch many routinely keep an eye on their neighbours' houses - membership of Neighbourhood Watch made no difference, and

f) in the event the police collected little information that was of value to them from Neighbourhood Watch.

There is thus little evidence that Neighbourhood Watch has significantly increased 'watching' or made it more effective, except for the BCS finding that there is a higher rate of reporting of incidents to the police.

ii) Neighbourhood Watch as a fear of crime reduction measure

The 1988 British Crime Survey (Mayhew et al 1989) found that 60% of members were fairly or very worried about burglary, compared to 55% of non-members. This greater fear amongst members remained even where other fear related factors such as sex, perceptions of risk and disorderliness, crime level in the area and previous

victimisation are taken into account. However, this does not necessarily mean that membership of Neighbourhood Watch causes fear of crime. Rather, it may be that those already more fearful are thereby motivated to join a scheme. Indeed some evidence for this is given where it is noted that whilst 61% of those who were either very or fairly worried about being burgled said they would join a scheme, of the remainder only 47% said they would do so. However, it is also pointed out that fear of crime may he increased through membership by sensitising those joining to individual and local area risks, perhaps an essential corollary of trying to motivate greater crime prevention activity. Though again this may have reflected prior differences in risk estimates, it was found that 35% of members thought that they were likely to be burgled over the coming 12 months as against 27% of non-members. This pattern of increased perception of risk was consistent across ACORN groups. Both members and non-members, of course, very substantially overestimate risks.

McConville and Shepherd (1992) identify dangers of increased fear of crime through Neighbourhood Watch. This may occur not only by sensitising members to risks, but also by alerting them to how little the police are able to do about crime and by isolating them from neighbours about whose activities suspicions might he fostered. In the event McConville & Shepherd found no evidence for actual fear of crime increases, which they explain by the generally rather moribund state of schemes covered by the study.

Bennett (1990) includes in his study by far the most sophisticated measurement of fear of crime and the impact of Neighbourhood Watch on it. Using various items identified through factor analysis he constructed a scale to measure a) fear of personal victimisation and b) fear of household victimisation. Both in the Acton and in the Wimbledon experimental areas Bennett found reductions in fear of crime. Less encouragingly, using multivariate analysis he found a statistically significant improvement only in relation to fear of household crime in Acton. There is no comparison with changes in fear of crime in the control areas.

In relation to Kirkholt, Forrester et al (1990) report that a questionnaire administered over ten months to 934 members of participating Home Watch households revealed that compared to the 68% of respondents who had worried about becoming a victim of crime in the year before joining a scheme, only 49% were worried after having done so. No comparison was made with non-scheme participants. Forrester et al also note that though burglary remained overwhelmingly the most worrying crime, there was a drop of nearly 20% in the number who were worried compared to the pre-membership period. Specifically asking about the effect of Home Watch membership on fear of crime 57% of participants claimed that it reduced fear of crime, 39% that it had no effect and 3% that it had increased it.

Finally Payne (1989), in his study of three schemes in Scotland, asked respondents to estimate retrospectively what effect Neighbourhood Watch had had on their

levels of fear of crime. This is a much weaker method than one which compares 'before' and 'after' measurements. Payne asked first about how worried respondents had become about leaving their house empty when they went out, and second about how worried they had become about walking alone in the neighbourhood at night since the Neighbourhood Watch scheme started. As with their views on actual crime trends, those in the more affluent and Neighbourhood Watch active Craigleith seemed to have been most reassured since the formation of Neighbourhood Watch, as revealed in Table A5.

Table A5: Changes in fear of crime with the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch as reported by respondents in three areas in Schotland (Payne 1989)

		Craigleith	Drylaw	**Tanshall/** Caskieberran
Leaving home empty	More worried	8%	12%	7%
	Less worried	34%	25%	21%
Walking alone in neighbourhood at night	More worried	6%	15%	11%
	Less worried	10%	13%	8%

The results of the studies summarised here clearly point in different directions. There is some evidence that Neighbourhood Watch can sometimes be accompanied by a fall in some aspects of fear of crime, but this is by no means automatic. Bennett's most stringent test found statistically significant changes only in relation to household offences in one of the two study areas examined. What we do not yet know is how Neighbourhood Watch may be implemented in particular conditions to maximise fear reduction and minimise fear enhancement amongst varying sub-groups in the community. These crucial issues have not been addressed. It may well be that Neighbourhood Watch can simultaneously trigger both fear increasing mechanisms (sensitising members to risks and leading them to realise that police powers to reduce them are rather limited), and fear decreasing mechanisms (enhancing residents' sense of control over their neighbourhood). If this is the case quite complex outcome patterns in regard to different individuals in varying community contexts might be created.

iii) Neighbourhood Watch and improvements in police/public relationships

One beneficial outcome from the establishment of Neighbourhood Watch schemes might be improvement in police/public relationships. Little, however, is known about this.

Payne (1989) asked a few questions about how members saw the effect of Neighbourhood Watch on the way the public relates to the police. As with the perceived effects on crime and fear of crime the results suggest a measure of success, with Craigleith performing best of the three areas. Asked whether Neighbourhood Watch had helped people to get to know the police better 47% in Craigleith, 35% in Drylaw and 31% in Tanshall/Caskieberran said it had, whilst, respectively, 12%, 10%, and 20% said it had not. In reply to a question asking whether the Neighbourhood Watch scheme had made a difference to the kind of police service in the neighbourhood 28%, in Craigleith, 24% in Drylaw and 21 %, in Tanshall/Caskieberran said it had and only 1% in each area said it had not.

Following multi-variate analysis, Bennett (1990) found an improvement in relationships with the police in Acton and a deterioration in Wimbledon, measured by respondents' evaluations of contacts with the police. Neither change was statistically significant. There was, however, a statistically significant reduction in sightings of the police on toot in the area in both Acton and Wimbledon. This is echoed in frequent complaints from those in Neighbourhood Watch areas.

iv) Informal victim support

There is little evidence concerning the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Watch in fostering informal victim support. In one demonstration project in a relatively high crime hard-to-let inner city estate of some 1,050 properties, 'Care Watch' was planned in part explicitly to foster victim support within the community (Sampson & Farrell 1990).

In the event Care Watch was not implemented. In large measure this was because of lack of community interest, though this impression may also have led to low commitment from workers in their efforts to 'sell' the idea. Only three of 27 victims interviewed were unequivocally enthusiastic about the idea of Care Watch. The remaining 89%, felt that their reservations over-rode what many could see as possible benefits in improving their sense of security. Divisions in the community producing distrust or even hostility, a preference for privacy, the use of family for informal support, and feelings of intimidation all seemed to play a part (Sampson 1991).

This does not bode well for ready use of Neighbourhood Watch as a vehicle for informal victim support in high crime, inner-city disadvantaged communities. The vast majority of Neighbourhood Watch schemes, however, do not fall in these areas and here informal victim support might usefully be provided.

v) Neighbourhood Watch and the development of community spirit

A final aspiration of Neighbourhood Watch is to help cement communities. Clearly the injunction to look out for suspicious local activities and to report them to the

police potentially undermines this aspiration. Nevertheless, McConville and Shepherd note that in one site of their research, a village in Gwent where people had hitherto been isolated from one another, Neighbourhood Watch was having a positive effect in bringing them together. Bennett (1990) notes improvements in a sense of social cohesion in both Neighbourhood Watch sites included in his study, the improvement having statistical significance in Acton. Asked whether Neighbourhood Watch had made people act towards one another in different ways Payne (1989) found that 52% in Craigleith, 32% in Drylaw and 25% in Tanshall/Caskieberran thought that it had made them act in a more neighbourly way, and only in Tanshall/Caskieberran were 2% to be found who felt that it had made people act in a less neighbourly way. Webb (1993) also shows how Neighbourhood Concern Groups, which are akin to Neighbourhood Watch, have been developed in one area in Nottingham as a vehicle for empowering members of disadvantaged communities, who are thereby able more effectively to articulate their wants from local authorities.

vi) Negative consequences of Neighbourhood Watch

We have so far examined the available evidence concerning whether or not Neighbourhood Watch and the measures associated with it are effective in attaining a number of scheme aims and objectives. It is also useful to consider some of the possible costs. Much that follows is rather speculative, and unlike the preceding discussion the points made are taken largely, though not exclusively, from American writings. The data are even weaker than those available for estimating Neighbourhood Watch successes, which were themselves rather limited, as already indicated. Tentative conclusions which may be drawn are:

1. Where there are offender residents liable to intimidate others, even though crime rates may well be high, it will be difficult to establish Neighbourhood Watch. Indeed the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch may be provocative. We noted Sampson's (1991) evidence that some people felt intimidated in the high crime inner city estate where her project was undertaken. McConville & Shepherd (1992) quote a police officer stating that people on council estates will he intimidated if they are seen to work with the police in Neighbourhood Watch (p.140). From an American perspective Rosenbaum (1987) claims that research suggests that in neighbourhoods with the most serious crime problems 'suspicion, distrust, hostility and a lack of shared norms' inhibit developments. This does not mean that establishment of Neighbourhood Watch in high crime areas is impossible, but it does indicate that those local people initiating or joining schemes may put themselves in some jeopardy.

2. Neighbourhood Watch may have the potential to create rather than heal divisions. A distinction between respectable and unrespectable residents may

emerge, distancing some at risk of offending from those who might otherwise be able to effect informal regulation. In particular young black men may be treated as threats, and in being so treated may become threats through non-acceptance by fellow residents (see McConville and Shepherd 1992, Webb 199.3, Rosenbaum 1987). There is a danger also of treating those who have committed crimes as forever excluded.

This highlights a contradiction between the surveillance and informal interpersonal control thrusts in Neighbourhood Watch. Surveillance emphasises attention to the strange or deviant and reporting it to the police. It thus serves to protect the 'respectable' from the 'rough'. The 'good' come together, and learn to recognise and trust each other. They are better able to watch out for and identify the 'bad', and to bring in agencies of social control, notably the police, to regulate unacceptable behaviour. The crime prevention idea is that those who are tempted to break the law are deterred from doing so by their fear that they will be identified and reported to the police. However, if the 'good' members of the community become a cohesive group at a distance from those identified as 'bad' the prospects for controlling the deviant are compromised. Interpersonal influence within a community ('informal social control') only works amongst those with significant contact with others whose opinions are valued. The exclusion of the 'bad' pushes them beyond the scope of influence of the respectable members of the community. Worse still, the excluded may have their deviant identities and inclinations fostered. The only source of valued approval is other deviant people, and what may well be approved is deviant behaviour (see Rosenbaum 1987).

3. The popularity of Neighbourhood Watch in low crime areas, together with the felt responsibility adequately to meet the demand for servicing schemes, may divert police resources from high crime areas with high need to low crime areas with less need (see McConville and Shepherd 1992).

4. The high expectations of the public, the difficulties in meeting them and the inability of Neighbourhood Watch in all places clearly to reduce crime risks creating disappointment, disillusionment anal dissatisfaction (see Rosenbaum 1987).

5. A by-product of Neighbourhood Watch, heightening a sense of vulnerability, may be to create fears which real risk rates may not warrant (McConville and Shepherd 1992; Rosenbaum 1987). There is a possible contradiction between increasing concerns with crime, which may be needed to motivate residents to take action to reduce their vulnerability, and reassuring people about their fears.

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6. There may be some areas in which the problems of establishing Neighbourhood Watch are so great, the potential benefits so doubtful, and the risks of undesirable by-products so serious that alternative community based approaches to crime prevention may be preferable, at least in the short term (Webb 1993; Rosenbaum 1987).

At the beginning of this review, it was argued that the crucial question is, 'How and under what conditions can Neighbourhood Watch maximise intended positive outcomes, and minimise negative ones?'. The most reputable studies in the literature which are examined here speak to this only partially, as indicated above. They do, though, point to scope for the police to develop, alongside partners, a more strategic approach to Neighbourhood Watch which is systematically sensitive to community variations in crime, fear of crime and patterns of social relationships. The strategy outlined in the main part of the paper advocates an approach tailored to the broadly differing needs and circumstances across a range of community types.

It might be hoped that future studies will be undertaken to develop a fuller grasp of the way in which elements of Neighbourhood Watch can most effectively be implemented in varying community contexts to yield greatest all-round benefits.

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