



## **The London Borough of Bromley Neighbourhood Watch Association**

**Charity No: 1101560**

### **STREET CO-ORDINATOR'S GUIDE**

#### **Introduction**

On behalf of Bromley Neighbourhood Watch Association (BNWA), I am pleased to present your Co-ordinators Handbook that I am sure you will find of great assistance to you as front-line troops in our efforts to make your Borough a safer and happier place in which to live.

#### **Background**

Neighbourhood Watch started in this country by the Police in 1982 with the basic aim of reducing household burglary. Today, it is about much more than crime prevention; it also aims to foster 'good neighbourliness' and a strong community spirit. Neighbourhood Watch is the fastest growing 'grass roots' organisation in the country and there are over 200,000 schemes nationwide. Neighbourhood Watch is not just about crime and disorder, although it obviously has a part to play in any initiative to combat both. In most of London, the fear of crime is greater than the reality. In many neighbourhoods it is not always the most serious crimes that cause concern for the majority of residents; rather it is the overall quality of life, litter, graffiti, troublesome neighbours – in fact a dripping tap which can wear people down until apathy and a feeling of helplessness set in. Tackling these issues demands the development of community spirit and commitment to make a positive change to the quality of life in the area. In some instances, Neighbourhood Watch can act to direct problems to the relevant organisation, e.g. the Local Authority for complaints about noise, and consequently reduce the number of inappropriate calls to the Police. Neighbourhood Watch has the ability to improve community spirit but a sense of purpose and a sense of achievement are missing in many schemes. This is often linked to a lack of clarity on objectives. Where schemes have defined objectives and evaluate what they have done, greater enthusiasm and satisfaction is evident. Experience shows there are a number of critical elements that need to be present for Neighbourhood Watch to succeed. This strategy focuses on those elements where the Association can have a direct influence on making schemes more effective.

BNWA recognises the commitment of co-ordinators in keeping Bromley a safe place in which to live and work. It supports those who build and retain community spirit thus reducing the fear of crime and raising the quality of life for all. BNWA will promote active citizenship in the community with greater public participation in the prevention and solution of crime through Neighbourhood Watch activities.

The aims and objectives of the Association are to:

- Provide support, guidance and resources for co-ordinators;
- Support areas still to establish Watches;
- Provide a strong voice for links with key partners;
- Set up regular communication links;
- Identify and circulate best practice;
- Increase local community involvement;
- Ensure membership reflects the community it serves; and
- Raise status and professionalism by providing specialist training opportunities.

## The Co-ordinator's Role

The Co-ordinator is the lynch-pin of the organisation and the first contact their neighbour will have with Neighbourhood Watch. He or she is the person who will give out information (e.g. by distributing *Newsletters* and any other information members might find helpful) and who will be someone to whom members can express their concerns and seek a solution by acting together. The Co-ordinator is also someone who can monitor matters of concern in their Watch and pass information on through their Safer Neighbourhoods Team and/or direct to the Borough Police. The role includes maintaining the Watch and acting as a link with other Co-ordinators, the Police and BNWA. The Co-ordinator's duties include collection and circulation of Neighbourhood Watch material (e.g. newsletters, stickers, crime prevention advice). The Co-ordinator may hold occasional meetings of his or her Watch and encourage members to report suspicious activity. The Co-ordinator might want to consider creating and distributing a Watch newsletter, should be prepared to attend the Annual General Meeting and may want to consider serving on the Executive Committee. Try, too, to have a designated deputy.

## Setting up and Developing a Watch

**Set objectives** – Decide the issues, relevant to your area, you want your Watch to tackle.

**Consider the size of the Watch** – There is no upper limit but you should not aim too low. Around 30 homes is a manageable size for a Watch. If you live in a small cul-de-sac, for instance, consider including other, surrounding streets. Decide where you would like your street signs to be positioned.

**Canvas your neighbours** – You should next contact the residents of your target area, personally or by mail drop to see how many are interested in forming a Watch.

**Appoint a Co-ordinator** – The Co-ordinator's role is described above and is key to an effective scheme.

**Consider Street Wardens** – The main delivery mechanism should be via e-mail as this is how you will normally be contacted by BNWA. Although delivery of hard copy material is rarely urgent, you may want to consider splitting the Watch into segments (about 10 homes each) and appointing a Street Warden for each segment. This way, the Co-ordinator distributes his or her local segment, plus single, bulk deliveries to the Wardens.

**Organise a "Launch" venue** – Decide where the Watch is to "launched".

**Keeping records** - Talk to your members before you start. Discuss with them exactly what information you plan to collect and how you will be storing it. Only go-ahead with their agreement. Never give anyone information about a member unless he/she has agreed. Keep a record of crimes and other problems reported by members but never keep records about people suspected of committing a crime or anti-social behaviour.

## Actions for Watch Members

'Observe and report' - promptly alert the Police if there are suspicious persons in the neighbourhood. Keep a watchful eye on each others' home and cars when they are at work, on holiday or in hospital. Ensure items such as milk left on the doorstep, or mail spilling out of the letterbox, are removed – do not let an opportunist burglar know that the house is empty!

Discreetly identify elderly and other vulnerable neighbours and invite them to ask for help when faced with unsolicited callers; and make sure they are alright in times of severe weather conditions or power cuts; or if they have not been seen for a while.

Tell the Co-ordinator about matters of concern such as anti-social behaviour, graffiti, vandalism, bad parking, poor street lighting and rubbish tipping; and consider keeping your own diary (anonymously if you prefer) to help maintain a record for the Police.

Look at what needs to be done to improve your area – for example, organise with the council a special rubbish collection day. Bromley Council will collect large, unwanted items but it has to be a well organised event covering a lot of people.

Focus on cleaning up graffiti – cleaning kits are available from the Council.

Work together to support a local charity, e.g. by holding a coffee morning or a book sale.

Involve young people in the activities – many of them have good ideas about what needs doing. Contact the local brownies or cubs groups; they might like to join in. If you have a school nearby, they also might like to get involved as part of their citizenship studies.

## **Preventing Crime**

**If you are going on holiday** - Cancel deliveries of milk, newspapers etc. but don't announce your departure in a shop full of people! Only tell those who need to know (e.g. immediate neighbours). Ensure your home looks occupied – closed curtains during the day make it look as if no one is at home! Consider automatic time switches to switch on lights and a radio in a downstairs room.

**Beware of bogus callers and tradesmen** - Distraction burglary, bogus caller crime and burglary by trick is increasing! Criminals use a variety of hoaxes to get into people's homes:

- Small children who have lost their ball in the garden;
- People needing to borrow a pen to leave a message for a neighbour;
- 'Carers' from the hospital picking up people for appointments;
- Bogus police checking for counterfeit notes or chasing criminals escaping through the back garden;
- Delivery men or women leaving packages;
- People with broken-down cars needing to use the phone or wanting money for public transport;
- Bogus callers pretending to be from a gas or water company (to help to reduce this threat, utility undertakings have introduced a system whereby their workmen should only be allowed entry if they can give the householder a pre-agreed code-name).

Be a good neighbour to someone vulnerable to this type of crime, e.g. the elderly, remind them they should not open their door to anyone without proper prior arrangement, and let them know that they may call you if they are worried about someone at the door. This could make all the difference. If you think that you have been visited by one of these bogus callers, telephone 999 straight away.

Bogus tradesmen are also of concern, like those who knock at the door saying they would like to check your roof for loose tiles or offer to tarmac your drive as they have some left over from a previous job. Many of these people will either grossly over-charge for a bad job – or might even be checking out your home to see whether they would be able to achieve easy entry when you are out. Always ask yourself: "Would I have had these repairs done if a trader had not called?" If the answer is "no", think very carefully about your decision! If the trader refuses to leave when asked, call the Police. Bromley Trading Standards should be informed of any such cases but, remember, they will have less chance of taking effective action against bogus traders if there is no evidence with which to follow-up the incident. So, to help them, have the suspected bogus trader provide you with a *written* estimate, note the trade name under which they are operating and try to make a note of their vehicle's registration number.

## **Protecting your Possessions and Personal Security**

- Consider marking items of value with your postcode, plus your house or flat number.
- If the item is too small, consider photographing them and write a description.
- Try not to use a mobile phone in crowded areas where it could be easily snatched from you and avoid keeping it in public view.

- Always use your phone's security pin code; security mark it and the battery with your postcode; register it with your network operator, so that they can block its SIM card if it's stolen; and make a note of your phone's unique serial number (you can read this by typing \*#06# into your phone).

### **Protect yourself from Identity Theft**

- Before disposing of it, shred any paperwork that could enable someone to represent themselves as you. Such paperwork includes bank/credit card statements, invitations to take out a credit card and household bills bearing your name and address.
- Keep all such paperwork locked or hidden away in case your home is burgled.
- Never disclose your password or PIN for bank or credit cards.
- Try not to use a PIN that is a date and try not to use identifiers such as your mother's maiden name, or reveal other personal information, particularly your date of birth, as such information can easily be used to impersonate you or even to obtain a copy of your birth certificate. Also, consider regularly checking your current credit status position with a credit check agency.

### **Burglaries**

- Put yourself in a burglar's shoes and think about how you could gain entry to your own home. Remember, the burglar would want to avoid making a noise or being seen. Most would first wander around to identify easy targets – looking at these from the road, an adjoining footpath or alley, or any open land before deciding which home to break into. They look for homes that appear to be empty, have easy access to the rear and provide good cover in the form of bushes and trees. They prefer those with no visible signs of protection such as alarms and lighting and will not normally try to enter a garden through, say, a prickly hedge.
- Be aware that once a property has been burgled, it is likely to be burgled again within a very few weeks. This is because the burglar has already found the weak points to your security and has first hand knowledge of the layout of the property. So enlist the watchful eye of neighbours during this critical period and try to set up a cordon of protection around the home in question to catch the villain second time around!

### **Vehicle Safety**

- When leaving your car, ensure you lock it securely, set the alarm and, if you have one, the immobiliser. If leaving the vehicle overnight, park it in the garage or behind locked gates on the drive if you are lucky enough to have them. Where this is not possible, park in a well lit place preferably under a street lamp.

### **Scams**

- A scam is when people con you out of your cash by offering you something for nothing! To recognise one, ask yourself "Is it too good to be true?" Be wary and do not respond to an offer if they ask you to send money straight away or give you a PO Box number as their address or ask you not to tell anyone about the deal! Further information is available from Trading Standards.

### **Personal Security**

- Be aware of what is going on around you when out and about, especially where the area has poor street lighting and in the early mornings / late evenings.
- Whenever possible, during the above times, when you need to go out do not travel on your own. Go with a friend. You will feel more confident and two or more people together deter the opportunist mugger.
- Keep valuables secured and out of sight.

## Fire Prevention

### IF YOUR HOME CAUGHT FIRE, WOULD YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO?

For a fire to exist there must be three things present: oxygen, fuel & heat. These 3 elements make up what is commonly called the Fire Triangle.

#### If a Fire should occur in your home:

- **Leave the house** - Familiarize yourself with at least 2 exits from each room; e.g. one window and one door. Know where the exits are and practice using them.
- **Have a safe meeting place outside your home** - A fire is no time to be worrying about who made it out and who did not. By establishing a central meeting place outside, you can count heads and not have to wonder who might still be inside.
- **Telephone the Fire Brigade (999)** - from a Neighbour's house
- **Do not re-enter the home for any reason** - Once you are outside, do not go back.
- **In a fire, seconds count** - for early detection of fires, install **smoke detectors** near your sleeping areas. If you have a multi-story house, install detectors at each level.

### REMEMBER, THE BEST STEP TO TAKE IS TO PREVENT FIRES FROM OCCURRING

- Knowing what to do should fire occur is very important. More important still is the **prevention** of a fire. Take the time to inspect your home for possible safety hazards, bare wires, and improperly operating heating equipment.
- Fire prevention is something the entire family may participate in. Encourage children to assist with checking the home for hazards.
- By taking the time to carefully inspect your home for possible hazards, you may prevent a major catastrophe later on.

#### Reporting crime and anti-social behaviour:

- **Emergencies** – telephone **999**
- **Non-emergencies** - telephone **101**
- **Racist crime, hate mail, homophobic crime or domestic violence** - telephone the local Community Safety Unit
- **Disorder, anti-social behaviour** - telephone the local Community Safety Partnership
- **Graffiti, abandoned vehicles and fly-tipping for removal** - Log onto Council's website to find the numbers for these services
- **Anti-Terrorist Hot Line** - Where anyone has specific information to assist police concerning terrorist activity telephone **0900 789 321**
- **Anonymous reporting of crime** - telephone **0800 555111** for **Crimestoppers** to give information about a person whom you believe has committed a crime. Remember though, that whilst a crime can be reported anonymously by this method, the police will be unable to investigate it without a statement from you.

## Useful Contacts

*Insert your local contacts here – a sample of the type of contact is listed below:*

**Bromley Neighbourhood Watch Association:** info@bromleynwa.org.uk

**Community Safety Partnership:**

**Borough Council:**

**Borough Police/ Community Consultative Group (BCEF):**

**Trading Standards:**