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CITIZEN FOCUS AND
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Volunteer Street Patrols - Briefing

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Cabinet via Chief Constable Spence with guidance on whether ACPO wish to support street patrols being carried out by community volunteers. It has been compiled by the Citizen Focus and Neighbourhood Policing Programme (CF&NPP) with input from the NPIA's Research, Analysis and Information Unit (RAI).

2. Background – ACPO Cabinet, January 2009

The issue of street patrols by volunteers was first discussed by ACPO Cabinet in January 2009. The recommendations from the initial paper presented were as follows:

- The need for ACPO Cabinet to endorse a Police Service-wide consultation and assessment on the desirability of volunteer street patrols
- The potential development of guidance around the running of volunteer street patrols if ACPO agreed to endorse as above
- The potential need for wider consultation beyond the Police Service on the issue
- That the Citizen Focus business area would lead any work agreed and would commission the NPIA (CF&NPP) to undertake initial scoping.

ACPO Cabinet thought it would be useful to have an ACPO position but also felt there was a need for the Service to be cautious about signalling ACPO ownership and responsibility for this type of activity as it could lead to difficulties which would need to be addressed, such as health and safety, insurance and duty of care. It was also decided that any future consultation should be restricted to Chief Officers via the ACPO intranet.

Therefore CC Spence asked the NPIA to do the following:

- Commission RAI to identify and outline the existing research literature on street patrols conducted by volunteers.
- Commission a position paper from the CF&NPP outlining the issues.

3. Street patrols by volunteers

No agreed definition of street patrols by volunteers currently exists. Various 'street patrol' schemes have taken place on an ad hoc basis over a number of years and the majority of these schemes are no longer in existence. There have however, been a number of recent national developments in relation to volunteering and community empowerment that have brought the issue of volunteer street patrols to the fore, including:

- 'Engaging communities in fighting crime. A review by Louise Casey' (2008)¹: which outlined that a majority of the public were prepared to play an active role in tackling crime but were often unsure how.
- 'Volunteering across the criminal justice system. A report by Baroness Neuberger' (2009)²: which highlighted the many benefits that volunteers can bring across the criminal justice landscape.
- The NPIA Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) Review (2008)³: which raised the possibility of volunteer PCSOs who would be subject to significant police regulation similar to Special Constables. (This idea has since been put on hold due to lack of support by forces although there was some interest outlined by forces during the scoping work for the PCSO Progress Report published in August 2009.)
- The emergence of faith-based volunteer street patrols including Street Pastors and Street Angels in many force areas.
- The emergence of other patrols, some more formalised than others, in some forces.

4. Street patrols by volunteers – the evidence

RAI commissioned a systematic literature search on volunteer street patrols. Overall, the search identified very few studies on the topic, some of which were based on research conducted in the US during the 1980s.

Impact

An initial examination of these studies showed that no robust outcome evaluations have previously been carried out on the effectiveness of volunteer street patrols. However, the two limited studies that had been conducted on the 'Guardian Angels' in New York did not find any conclusive evidence of a positive impact on crime or the fear of crime:

¹ Casey, L. (2008) *Engaging communities in fighting crime*. London: Cabinet Office

² Neuberger, J. (2009) *Volunteering across the criminal justice system*. available at <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/124076/volunteers%20in%20cjs.pdf>

³ NPIA (2008) *NPIA PCSO Review*. available at: http://www.npia.police.uk/en/docs/PCSO_Review_Final_Report.pdf.

- Kenney (1987)⁴ reported that the volunteer patrols had no statistically significant impact on crime within the patrolled areas, and that the presence of these patrols had little impact on people's fear of crime.
- Pennell *et al.* (1989)⁵ found no association between volunteer street patrols and reported violent crime. The study found that there had been a reduction in property crime, but could not make an association between this fall and volunteer patrols because the level of *police* foot patrol had increased (a confounding factor).

In comparison, there is a much larger volume of research on the impact of patrols conducted by the police (not volunteers). Systematic reviews of this evidence have found that targeted foot patrol by the police is effective in reducing crime.⁶ Recent UK studies have also highlighted the importance of targeted police foot patrol in reassuring the public and – when implemented alongside community engagement and problem-solving – in improving public confidence.⁷ While these police studies tell us nothing about volunteer patrols, they indicate the *potential* for them to have positive effect. An earlier planned study on the impact of volunteer patrols summarised their potential benefits. The outcomes that it was thought citizen patrols could possibly deliver included: crime reduction; an increased public sense of security; improved police-community relations; improved geographic coverage of patrol; and increased citizen participation (Yin *et al.* 1977).⁸

Implementation

The initial examination of the research literature carried out by RAI highlighted a number of potential planning and implementation issues with citizen patrol schemes. A small qualitative study on a Cardiff scheme, which was formed in response to a local prostitution problem, found a number of perceived concerns amongst the police, voluntary organisations, and local residents (Sagar, 2005). Their concerns included: displacement of the problem; a lack of accountability to the wider community; disillusionment amongst volunteers if police support was not maintained; and vigilantism.

5. Examples of current patrols / schemes

The initial ACPO Cabinet paper outlined three examples of structured street patrols. Two of the examples, however, are no longer operational. The third project involves Neighbourhood Watch members patrolling alongside Police Community Support Officers.

⁴ Kenney, D. J. (1987) *Crime, Fear, and the New York City Subways: The role of citizen action*. New York: Praeger.

⁵ Pennell, S.; Curtis, C.; Henderson, J.; Tayman, J. (1989) 'Guardian Angels: A Unique Approach to Crime Prevention'. *Crime and Delinquency* 35: 378-400.

⁶ Sherman, L. and Eck, E. (2002) 'Policing for Crime Prevention', in Farrington, D. *et al.* (eds) *Evidence-Based Crime Prevention*. London: Routledge.

⁷ Tuffin, R., Morris, J. and Poole, A. (2006) *An Evaluation of the Impact of the National Reassurance Policing Programme*. London: Home Office; Quinton, P. and Morris, J. (2008) *Neighbourhood Policing: The Impact of Piloting and Early National Implementation*. London: Home Office.

⁸ Yin, R. K., Vogel, M. E., Chaiken, J. M., and Both, D. R. (1977) *Citizen Patrol Projects – Phase 1 Summary Report*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice

Following further enquiries of forces' current activities in relation to schemes loosely defined as street patrols by volunteers, a number of additional schemes were identified:

Street Pastors: volunteers from local churches who engage with the public, often on weekend evenings to care, listen, and help in practical ways. Set up in April 2003 by the Ascension Trust the scheme currently operates in over 100 locations in the UK and has more than 2,500 trained volunteers nationally. Typically a minimum of four churches in an area get together and set up a Street Pastor scheme. A management group is set up and a coordinator identified.

Volunteers (who must be over 18 years old) are recruited from local churches. References are obtained from their church and volunteers are provided with 12 days of training. Each volunteer receives a uniform (to help distinguish them from statutory authorities) and commits to going out on the streets at least once a month. Exact times depend on the local situation, but volunteers normally go out at the weekend between the hours of 10pm and 4am, usually in areas known to have regular social disturbance. Street Pastors patrol in pairs, with a minimum of two pairs operating together at any one time. Each volunteer carries a mobile phone for safety and as they walk, they talk and engage with people informally on the street, offering a sympathetic and non-judgemental ear.

Street Angels: established in 2005 by the Churches Together Network in Halifax, the scheme is similar to Street Pastors. It operates in Durham, Halifax, Bradford, Grimsby, Harrogate, Hebden Bridge, Huddersfield, Ipswich, Manchester, Newbury, Rochdale, Todmorden, Wakefield, Watford and Worthing. They patrol the streets of town centres looking for people who have become vulnerable in any way. They offer help and assistance, from directing lost people to calling for medical assistance to those who have become ill. The Halifax scheme won the regional Tilley Award in 2008.

Street Watch (Hampshire): operational in East Hampshire since the scheme was established in the village of Four Marks in February 2008. As a result of concerns about the neighbourhood expressed by some local residents, the local Chief Inspector invited those concerned to patrol their own streets in high visibility jackets and to work with police to challenge inappropriate behaviour and engage more with their own communities. The scheme now operates in four areas (Four Marks, Liphook, Holybourne and Petersfield).

Street Watch members are citizens with no police powers. Groups are managed by a volunteer co-ordinator who keeps a list of volunteers and provides advice, guidance and support in consultation with the local police. Volunteers must patrol in pairs and register each patrol on a specific website that the neighbourhood policing team can look at prior to the patrols taking place. If volunteers spot suspicious activity they are asked to report it to the police but not get involved. A short training

(usually one session) is provided followed by monthly meetings. Members of the neighbourhood policing team or a senior volunteer go out on the first patrol with new volunteers. Volunteers are asked to carry a mobile phone with them at all times.

The Street Watch scheme has protocols in place and insurance is provided by Lloyds Underwriters for any volunteer over 18 years of age. The existing areas for Street Watch are, however, in relatively affluent areas within East Hampshire which are different to deprived or inner city areas and evaluation may need to be undertaken to assess how transferable the model may be.

There are numerous other schemes operating across the country. These are generally one-off schemes and include local Neighbourhood Watch schemes, Community Wardens, Student Neighbourhood Volunteers, Insight Days and Nite Lite schemes. Further details are available on request from the CF&NPP team (contact details at the back of the briefing).

6. Potential benefits of street patrols by volunteers

Support to Neighbourhood Policing Teams: patrols could link to neighbourhood policing teams, communicate directly with the public, and report issues causing concern. Work is being planned to extend this work to include Environmental Visual Audits.

High visibility: volunteers generally wear high visibility tabards/ uniforms contributing to the patrolling presence on the streets. There are several anecdotal examples of where the presence of volunteers has led to a direct public reaction, such as vehicles slowing down when seeing volunteers wearing tabards/uniforms; however, no formal evaluation has been undertaken to establish whether volunteer patrols affect public confidence.

Increased community engagement: volunteer street patrols could provide a bridge between the police and members of the public who may not approach police officers. There is some evidence that suggests that if a structure is not in place and patrols do not continue, this could damage the reputation of the police (Sagar 2005).

Increased informal control by the community and community ownership: volunteers could gain a better knowledge of their local area and have an increased sense of ownership of issues in their locality.

Increased understanding of local policing: anecdotal evidence suggests that patrols could lead to a better understanding by volunteers of crime issues and the work of neighbourhood policing teams.

Reductions in crime: some force self-assessments have highlighted patrols as contributing to crime reductions in some areas, although it is difficult to attribute specific reductions to patrolling activity.

Reduced fear of crime: information about crime and risks can be provided to volunteers, and volunteers' direct experience of patrolling their areas has anecdotally led to volunteers feeling safer within the areas in which they live.

Level of public support: there is no robust evidence on the level of public support for volunteer street patrols. There is the possibility that the public could respond positively to patrols due to their non-confrontational stance and their willingness to help and support and take an interest in members of the community.

7. Potential negative/risk issues in relation to street patrols by volunteers

Significant health and safety issues: although, to date, patrols have reported no health and safety issues since schemes were implemented, including those working within the night time economy, the way schemes are established and rolled out needs to be considered by forces particularly in light of the limited training given to some volunteers.

Public Liability Insurance: schemes generally provide Public Liability Insurance and Accident Insurance cover. For example, Street Watch members who are listed on the scheme's website are covered by Lloyds Underwriters. It is a matter for individual members if they wish to take out additional personal accident / injury cover or public liability insurance. Volunteers are not allowed to drive whilst on patrol as this is not covered under existing insurance.

Police needing to provide support to schemes: police input can include support with inducting volunteers, accompanying volunteers on initial patrols and attendance at monthly meetings. Although not significant amounts of police time and support are required, this needs to be factored into any decision made by forces to support schemes.

Perceptions of patrols as being 'policing on the cheap': the introduction of volunteer street patrols could raise questions around why members of the public are undertaking work that police officers are paid to do from the public purse.

A perception that citizens are acting as vigilantes: the danger that members of the public are being allowed to patrol the streets with authority is a key concern, particularly in light of recent disturbances by the Far Right in Birmingham and Luton.

Recruitment, selection and training: mixed approaches to recruitment, selection and training could lead to wide variances in the skills, abilities and motivations of volunteers and pose a risk to the sustainability of such schemes.

Disillusionment from volunteers if police support is not maintained: there is evidence to suggest that if a structured approach and guidelines are not

put in place this can lead to breakdown of police support and disillusionment.

Volunteers not representing the collective will of the community and lacking accountability to the wider community: there is a danger that volunteers could be the 'usual suspects' who neither represent nor have the support/consent of their local community in relation to patrolling the public space.

The lack of any statutory framework guaranteeing minimum guidance and police agreement/oversight: without formal agreement from forces and/or national guidance

8. Risk assessments

One potential concern raised is the risk factors relating to volunteers patrolling the public space, sometimes at unsociable hours. None of agencies questioned, e.g. Ascension Trust (Street Pastors), Street Angels and Street Watch, however, had reported any incident whilst on patrol.

Street Watch: The organisation has operational risk assessments in place which were required, examined and approved by the insurers. All members have access to these risk assessments which are downloadable within the members' area of the website. The risks covered include avoiding confrontation to crossing the road, weather conditions, trip hazards, approaching animals, picking up litter and visibility.

Street Angels: A volunteer handbook has been drawn up which covers most risks and is reviewed annually. The scheme also has a police briefing before each shift which covers wanted people, situations to be aware of amongst other issues which makes volunteers aware of current risks.

Street Pastors: The Ascension Trust has a risk matrix document which outlines to all Street Pastors what they should do in situations including finding drugs, guns, knives as well as uniform, travelling and dealing with the public. Street Pastors in five London boroughs are also allowed to take guns off members of the public who want to give them up. Any items given up in this way are later handed to a senior member of the Metropolitan Police.

9. Evaluating the effectiveness of schemes

Street patrols by volunteers are only one of many tools forces make use of. Their effectiveness can be evaluated in numerous ways. Whereas specific performance measures are not used, many schemes use measures such as the number of hours of high visibility patrols provided by volunteers. For example, Leicestershire's Street Pastors gave 37,440 hours of visible patrol and recovered 2000 discarded hazardous material (e.g., bottles) from the streets during 2008/09. Patrols can be aligned to key hot spot locations with some patrols forming part of the formal tasking process. Local measures can be factored in although the key issues are increased visibility and community engagement.

10. Conclusion

At the present time there are no national guidelines to support forces undertaking or considering street patrols/ community walkabouts as well as the police and other local agencies working with them. The Home Office are not currently actively recommending volunteer street patrols but this issue may form part of the agenda for discussion with communities in the future.

There is a risk that, if ACPO supports volunteer street patrols generally, the public may interpret this support as 'carte blanche' to undertake patrols irrespective of a lack of official support – thereby fuelling concerns of vigilantism. This may have unintended consequences, such as fringe or Far Right groups taking opportunities to exert influence.

However, as highlighted in this report there are potential benefits and outcomes associated with such schemes which, with effective mitigation and management of the risks, could benefit local policing teams and their communities. One option may be to involve Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) to oversee any roll-out of volunteer street patrols.

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