

**The London Borough of Bromley
Neighbourhood Watch Association (BNWA)**

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, 7.30pm Thursday 19th April 2012
Bromley Football Club, Hayes Lane, Bromley, Kent BR2 9EF**

1. Welcome, Introductions & Apologies:

The Chairman, Clifford Longley JP, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone – there were about 75 people present. He requested all present to ensure they were signed in on the attendance sheets and 57 names were recorded. He also advised Cllr. Tim Stevens had provided a written apology and from the floor apologies were given for Mr. Urquart. The Secretary advised various e-mail apologies had also been received from Coordinators.

The Chairman requested approval of the 2011 AGM Minutes and these were unanimously agreed. He also thanked the Secretary.

2. Chairman's Report: This was given as follows:

“I am delighted to see you all here today. This is the first time we have notified our members of the date and time of an annual meeting exclusively through e-mail. Last year you may remember we reported that the cost of posting notices of the annual meeting to all our 800 members had become prohibitive. Hence, we said, in future we would be relying upon e-mail. Not all our coordinators have e-mail of course, though the great majority do, and those without can usually find some convenient way of reading and replying to e-mails.

Our ability to communicate with our members by e-mail has already transformed, and will continue to transform, the way we operate. Our membership list was well on the way to being modified into an electronic database by our former executive committee member Dave Stewart, and when he stood down for personal reasons at about the time of the last AGM, there was a pause in this process. I'm very glad to say that our new executive member James Ellis volunteered to step forward to fill the breach, and complete the task on which Dave Stewart had embarked.

An e-mail address book, enabling us to communicate with all our coordinators at once, quickly proved itself as a vital tool in the work of the Neighbourhood Watch Association. We were ready to test it at the beginning of August. This is exactly coincided with the outbreak of the serious riots in various parts of London, from which the Borough of Bromley was not immune.

As the rioting spread, there was clearly a shortage of reliable information, but certainly no shortage of rumour, most of it as unreliable as it was exaggerated. The then Borough Cmdr, Chief superintendent Charles Griggs, quickly circulated to members of the Bromley Community Engagement Forum his reassuring assessment of the situation in the area for which he was responsible. So we didn't bother with a trial run for the electronic database, we used the urgent messages from Charles Griggs. As far as I know we were

the only borough in London where the whole neighbourhood watch movement was mobilised as the rioting started, was properly and accurately informed, and thus was able to give the police such assistance as it could in the troubled days that followed.

Since that time we have tried to use the coordinator database to pass on to all of you significant pieces of information concerning community safety, crime prevention, and matters of interest to neighbourhood watch. I have to say we were on a steep learning curve. And we still are. We found we had to set in place some filtering mechanism so that the information being passed on was suitable for its purpose. The police also had to learn how to use this new facility. We are very fortunate to have Chief Inspector Carron Schusler on our executive committee, and whenever a doubt occurs about the wisdom of communicating information, for instance because it could compromise ongoing police investigations, we are able to quickly refer the material to her for advice.

We are now getting a steady flow of crime prevention alerts from the police, from the Bromley Council's Community Safety Department, and from Trading Standards. So far we have not received much negative feedback. This makes me think that the new facility is valued by our membership, and that we're getting the mixture about right. But we are very open to your views and suggestions, because we are still feeling our way. You should by now all have received the alert which was circulated on Monday about burglary, which begins

“Burglars are very active in Bromley at this time.”

The message is - Please be aware of crime prevention measures you can take to secure your property. If you see anything suspicious in your neighbourhood inform the police.

1. PVC and aluminium doors should have multi-locking systems which must be activated by lifting the handle and then locking with a key. It is not secure if you only lift the handle
2. Always engage your mortice lock on wooden doors. It is not secure if you only activate a Yale lock
3. Do not leave any windows open either on the ground or upper floors
4. Most burglars are looking for opportunities so lock gates to your garden and do not leave garages or sheds open

On the advice about informing the police I should just like to add a word of my own. Many coordinators have experienced the difficulty of not knowing when to dial 999 and when not to. There is now a simple answer - to dial 101. If the information you wish to pass on does not seem to justify the immediate attendance of a police response vehicle, then 101 is the one for you. But if you are wrong, and 999 would be the better course, the 101 operator will tell you so, and either put you through to the 999 emergency service or advise you to redial that number yourself. This is a neat solution to an old problem. Please make the 101 facility better known in your neighbourhood.

One issue that has arisen is this. In the old days, before the electronic database was operating, information disseminated from the executive to coordinators was sparse. If anything, we now run the danger of the opposite situation, deluging you with information. I have heard from several coordinators that they feel they are in some difficulties because it is not clear to them what we expect them to do with the information we're passing out.

Part of the answer, quite frankly, is that we're leaving it to their common sense. I suppose you could call this passing the buck downwards! Most coordinators do not have the e-mails of all households in the neighbourhood watch area they cover. Hence they must rely upon word-of-mouth, or on distributing a printed communication of some form. That can be expensive and time-consuming. As a coordinator myself, I do a combination of things. I am aware that not everything I receive in my NW inbox can be communicated instantly to my neighbours. It would be very helpful for us to know what you, our members, feel about this. How do you maintain contact with the households in your area? How can we help you do so?

More or less simultaneously with the steps that James Ellis took to get the database organised, another new member of the executive, Brian Rowland, offered to put together a provisional website. You will be aware, if you ever visited it, that the old BNWA website was well past its sell-by date. Brian already had a lot of experience in running a club website. So he put together for us a pretty comprehensive website, more or less everything he or we can think of that might be useful.

You will remember last year we mentioned that we had initiated a competition with technology students from Bromley College to design us a new website. Initially, Brian's work was not much more than a stopgap. However it has grown into our own very useful website. For instance all the information which we disseminate to our coordinators through the electronic database also goes on the website. What exactly will be the relationship between the existing BNWA website and whatever emerges from the Bromley College students' competition, it is too soon to say. The Bromley College project is almost ready to go, and I'm disappointed that we weren't able to give you a preview of it tonight.

So we have two new and powerful tools for keeping in touch with our members. I would urge all of you to make visiting the BMW a website a regular habit, but even more importantly, to pass on news of its existence to the households in the area you cover. Whether this would completely solve the problem that you have, of communicating with those households, I don't know. But it would be a big step forward.

This new electronic way of operating neighbourhood watch has also provided us with an answer to a tricky problem that was not satisfactorily dealt with before: how to recruit enrol and register new neighbourhood watch coordinators. It has suddenly become very simple. Someone who wants to volunteer as a coordinator, or someone who has been talked into it perhaps by a local friendly PCSO, now has somewhere to turn for instant advice and guidance. It seems to me the new system is working well. But perhaps we ought to remind ourselves that we are all unpaid volunteers, and from time to time the service we offer will be subject to human fallibility, not to mention forgetfulness! We're good, but we are far from perfect!

In the course of the year we have tried to develop our policy of liaising with safer neighbourhood panels and safer neighbourhood teams throughout the borough. I should like to say a word of praise for our PCSOs. In my opinion they are an unsung success story. They are not police on the cheap: they have a different role. Sometimes they get a

bad press, for the entirely unjustified reason that they do not have the powers of a police constable with a warrant card, such as powers of arrest. But it turns out that is a strength, not a weakness. With young people in particular, it makes the PCSO more approachable and less of an intimidating authority figure. Many a time has a difficult situation been defused by a tactful word from a local PCSO. This is in the best traditions of British policing: policing by consent, policing of the community by the community. PCSOs deserve our support. They are often also, may I add, very keen on Neighbourhood Watch!

Our efforts at improving liaison with SNTs will be greatly strengthened by the return to the executive of John Bruce, whom, as you well know, was secretary of this association for 10 years. Last year agreed to become a member of the executive committee of the Bromley Community Engagement Forum with specific reference to helping it to liaise with safer neighbourhood panels in the borough. He has now agreed to add a neighbourhood watch dimension to this liaison process, and indeed has agreed to stand for election to our executive. Welcome back, John!

Ideally we would like to see at least one member of every safer neighbourhood panel with specific responsibility for fostering neighbourhood watch in that ward area. This already happens in many wards. Similarly, in many wards, the sergeant in charge of the team has understood how valuable the neighbourhood watch movement can be in his or her efforts to foster and develop a relationship with the local community. Indeed in a few awards in the borough safer neighbourhood teams have set out to achieve 100% street coverage. Personally I would like to see that example of best practice followed throughout the borough.

In the course of last year a series of Neighbourhood Watch training evenings were held, which were I think judged successful and well appreciated by the members who attended. We noted however that many of them were old sweats at neighbourhood watch, and so maybe the name “training evening” was not really so appropriate. They knew as much about it as we did! We are not sure whether the demand exists to repeat this process in the coming year, and would very much appreciate your views. Whatever we call them, these evening events do enable us to get to know our coordinators. And it enables them to get to know each other. But there may be other ways in which this can be achieved.

The executive is working well as a team at the moment, though I do also think it is imperative that we find new members. I would ask you all to think about stepping forward to help the executive in its work. It is not onerous. It is what you make it. I can tell you it can be good fun as well. But the end of the meeting tonight, if you're interested, just leave your name with me or Aidan our secretary or another member of the executive and we will get in touch with you, to talk things over.

The executive is very well supported in its work by its partners: first, Bromley police especially through Carron Schusler who I should like to thank publicly for her help and encouragement, then by Colin Newman who heads the Community Safety Department at Bromley Council, who I am delighted to say is now back in circulation after a serious bout of illness. We have also had tremendous help from Sue McVicker and other members of Colin's team. Also from Rob Vale, of the Trading Standards Department, whose motto seems to be “always there when we need them”, and I thank them too. Last

but by no means least, Cllr. Tim Stevens, who is quite passionate about neighbourhood watch, and who now holds the very important portfolio for community safety in Bromley Council. He has become such a regular attender of our executive meetings that we have come to regard him as an ex officio member.

This is a very powerful and effective network. And it is yours, to make use of, to make Bromley a better place to live. Use it.

Thank you for your attention, thank you for serving as neighbourhood watch coordinators, and thank you for your continuing support for Bromley Neighbourhood Watch Association”.

The Chairman then asked if there were any questions:

Question 1: Was there any possibility of having details of other local Coordinators?

Answer 1: Names etc. are available. After discussion it was agreed a full list Ward by Ward can be provided giving: Coordinators Name / Road / E-mail / Tel. No.

Question 2: In Bickley Ward, details are given by the SNT, but Coordinators do not know the limit of the various Watch areas.

Answer 2: The Treasurer, Alf Kennedy, advised the Neighbourhood & Home Watch Network (NHWN) planned to have all Watch areas mapped. When completed, all Watches should be shown with details of approx. areas but it will not be precise.

3. Treasurer’s Report:

Accounts: Alf Kennedy (Treasurer) gave a short presentation on the accounts. He advised £3000 was available to improve communication with Coordinators. He added that full accounts details had been circulated with the Invitation/Agenda and were also on the BNWA website. A brief summary is:

	<i>2011</i>	<i>2010</i>
Balance £	4630	2287
Income £	10500	Nil
Expenditure £		
Web	156	49
Expenses	501	356
Training	nil	181
Signs/Stickers	7500	

4. Elections to Executive Committee:

a. The Chairman reported on the structure of the Association, advising it was a registered charity with the Charity Commission and had nominated Trustees.

b. Treasurer: The Chairman advised Alf Kennedy was proposed to again re-stand as Treasurer. This was agreed unanimously from the floor with no-one against.

c. Executive Committee: The existing Committee proposed to re-stand for election: Clifford Longley, Aidan McCulloch, Peter Toy, James Ellis, Brian Rowland and Irving Radnor. He added that John Bruce (BCEF) had agreed to volunteer and also announced a Coordinator Graham Pyefinch had volunteered to join at the AGM. The Chairman proposed all those named to be elected to the Committee for the coming year and this was unanimously agreed from the floor with no-one against.

d. The Chairman advised there were also ex-officio Committee Members: Cllr. Tim Stevens (Chair Safer Bromley Partnership), Ch. Insp. Carron Schusler (Met. Police), Colin Newman (Hd. Community Safety LBB) / Sue McVicker (SNDO LBB) and a BCEF Representative.

5. Guest Speakers:

- Councillor Tim Stevens. Chairman of the Safer Bromley Partnership:

The Chairman gave Cllr. Stevens apologies but read the following letter from him to the Meeting:

“My apologies for not being able to be with you in person today but I wanted to let you know how I see your activities supporting the work of the Safer Bromley Partnership.

One of my main priorities when I took over as portfolio holder for Public Protection and Safety last year was the protection of older people in our communities. Firstly, our older population deserve respect. The more vulnerable amongst the community should not have to fear being targeted by doorstep criminals and scams.

I wanted to put them at the forefront of our priorities for the year so I have been supporting Trading Standards with the launch of a new bank protocol where banks across the borough pledge to look out for older people withdrawing unusually large sums of money and inform us if they are suspicious. We have already saved thousands of pounds from ending up in the hands of unscrupulous traders lurking on the doorsteps of innocent, older vulnerable victims.

Secondly, I wanted to step up action against antisocial behaviour and I am pleased to say we are making good progress with police working closely with the council and other key partners. We have had two very successful clean days so far – one in St Mary Cray and one in Penge.

It is in work like all of this that Neighbourhood Watch can make a difference. The answers to many issues relating to low level crime and the protection of the vulnerable often lay within communities themselves. By keeping an eye out for anything suspicious in your street, fostering good relationships between neighbours and promoting a community spirit especially in this Diamond Jubilee year, you can often help to spot and stop problems before they escalate.

I have made some funding available for posters and signs to help you spread the word, but do be innovative about how you take your role forward. Local fundraising events can often bolster the work you are doing, for instance, and I'm sure you have other ideas too. I have also introduced an electronic news letter which goes out to residents and Coordinators and this provides an opportunity to let people know what you are doing and to get others involved.

I want to also draw your attention to the fine work our three Safer Neighbourhood Officers – Amanda Davis, Sue McVicker and Peter Warne - are doing to support local Neighbourhood Watch groups. Do keep in touch with them. And finally, I'd like to thank all Coordinators and volunteer members of the Executive for your commitment to keeping Bromley the safe and pleasant place it is in which to live, work and relax”.

- Colin Newman, Head of Community Safety, London Borough of Bromley:

The Chairman advised Colin Newman had been off work recently and invited him to say a few words but this was politely declined.

- Chief Inspector Carron Schusler, Metropolitan Police Service

The Chairman advised that he had sent a letter of thanks to Chief Superintendent Charles Griggs from BNWA on his departure. The new Borough Commander, Chief Superintendent Steph Roberts, had been due to attend but was unavoidably delayed on public transport and had sent her apologies. At very short notice Ch. Insp. Carron Schusler had kindly agreed to speak on her behalf.

Chief Insp. Schusler introduced herself and advised she was on the BNWA Executive Committee. She said it was an honour for her to represent the Police at the AGM and reported:

- i) the SNTs are out engaged in the Wards and are engaging with Coordinators.
- ii) Burglaries are on the increase in Bromley, which has the second highest level across London Boroughs. It is a very big problem with various police operations planned. Crime prevention is very important and security advice on UPVC doors has already been mentioned. The police need Coordinators to be their eyes and ears.
- iii) 999 Emergency /101 Non-Emergency Nos: If in doubt, always use 999. As comparison, Southwark has 1000 police to cover 11 sq. miles and Bromley has 300 to cover 60 sq. miles. Obviously the Boroughs have different crime levels and patterns.
- iv) PCSOs: are an excellent part of the police family. There is no reduction in numbers but many have joined the Regulars and there are now vacancies. Some rebalancing will take place on some Wards.
- v) Olympics: Police will be working very long hours. Coordinators should continue to report information to police.

vi) Conclusion: Ch. Insp. Schusler gave her personal thanks and that of the Metropolitan Police to all Coordinators. She is very keen to have partnership working, especially on larger Boroughs, and BNWA is a partnership agency and part of the bigger policing team.

A question followed on the European 112 emergency no. It was advised there were English speaking operators and calls went to the 999 system.

- Rob Vale, Head of Trading Standards

Gave a presentation on his Team's role and function in the Borough. A summary follows:

- i) Doorstep Crime: hugely under-reported, gave talks and presentations, had 100 rapid response calls and £360,000 prevented from being handed over
- ii) Age Restricted Products: Test purchases of alcohol, tobacco, fireworks, 18-certificate videos/DVDs etc.
- iii) Counterfit goods: Wine/vodka, condoms, clothing/shoes etc.
- iv) Other enforcement work: child safety with window blind cords
- v) Protecting the Elderly: Had a grant of £15000 for measures to protect vulnerable elderly people from rogue traders etc, which involved working together with banks and building societies, Care Homes and Nursing Homes. Fridge magnets with the Trading Standards Team were available.
- vi) Partnerships: They worked with many organizations and BNWA were part of the wider team. He gave an example of good work by 2 Coordinators had led to arrests.

A question was raised over grants for home insulation etc. He advised caution was required, especially by vulnerable people. If any doubts, Trading Standards should be contacted.

6. Close & Thanks etc:

The Chairman thanked Sue McVicker (SNDO LBB) for her assistance with the AGM. He also thanked everyone else present for attending and closed the Meeting.

A. McCulloch
BNWA Secretary
20th May 2012