

Cheshire Neighbourhood Watch Association (CNWA)
Chair's Report to the 6th AGM
Thursday 30th November 2023



The Cheshire Neighbourhood Watch Association continues to work across the four unitary authority areas of Cheshire to support and promote Neighbourhood Watch. The county has a population of approximately 1.1 million people in 476,501 households according to the most recent Census data in 2021. As of 30th October 2023, we had 1,304 registered main Neighbourhood Watch Coordinators, plus 82 Deputy Coordinators and two Area Coordinators. Whilst the overall picture is constantly shifting as Coordinators move away or retire, the number of volunteers and Neighbourhood Watch Schemes has stayed broadly constant over the course of the year. We supported 33 new Coordinators who registered new schemes to get started during 2023, and this work was eased by improvements to version 4 of the Alert database as we are now automatically notified of new registrations. Every new Coordinator receives a welcome email from CNWA with relevant information and is offered leaflets, stickers, and signs to get their scheme started. These materials are delivered by their local PCSO so that a connection is made to the local beat team of Cheshire Constabulary.

There were changes to the Committee over the last year. I took over from Julia Griffiths as Chair following our AGM in November 2022 and I'd like to thank her for helping me as I stepped into the role and for making the transition as smooth as possible for the organisation. Mike Jones had joined the Committee as temporary Secretary last November but subsequently fulfilled this role very effectively all year, so is no longer 'temporary'! Mike also volunteered to become a Multi-Scheme Administrator (MSA) and undertook training and police vetting so that he can also support our work using the Alert system; he has become a key member of the team. In December John Powell stepped away from his role as Fundraising Manager and Helen Kynnersley became an Associate Member of the Committee to finish her activities in partnership with the Girl Guides on behalf of Neighbourhood Watch without attending the main meetings. Graham Bushill stayed on throughout this period, as did our Treasurer Keith Stokes.

In January 2023 we resumed face-to-face Committee meetings for the first time since the pandemic and this year focused on strengthening the Committee to better support our members. We advertised for volunteers to take up various roles, and recruited Matthew Haynes as our Cyberhood Watch Ambassador and Grant Shaw as our Communications Lead. I'm delighted that Matthew and Grant joined the team as they bring expertise and enthusiasm, and fresh perspectives as they represent a younger age group than the rest of us! On a less positive note, we have not yet succeeded in recruiting Social Media expertise despite strenuous efforts which will continue.

Our partnership with Cheshire Constabulary continues to be strong. Our day-to-day contact is with Clare Harrison, Engagement Officer within the Corporate Communications Department of the force. She continues to be a huge support to us and our members, and I'd like to personally thank her for her hard work. Chief Superintendent Peter Crowcroft continues to support our work, including approving payment for a new order of street signs that we send out to Coordinators. We've seen less of Peter at our Committee meetings during 2023 due to his increased responsibilities within the force, but he asked Inspector Jason Murray to join our meetings instead. Jason also brings deep experience of neighbourhood policing to the table and is passionate about improving community safety.

Working with Jason and Clare we undertook a survey of PCSOs across Cheshire this year to understand their engagement with Neighbourhood Watch Coordinators and identify any problems that might inhibit it. We received 69 responses in total with representation from all parts of the county. Overall PCSOs understand the nature of CNWA as a volunteer led network and the potential benefits to members of the public of joining Neighbourhood Watch. Most PCSOs communicate with their local Coordinators even if there are not many schemes in their beat area and despite not receiving much or any response. We identified some opportunities to improve how PCSOs can easily find and communicate with their local Coordinators via the Alert system and have already implemented changes to address this. In addition, we identified opportunities to improve the training of PCSOs regarding Neighbourhood Watch and to support them to engage and recruit more Coordinators in areas where they are thin on the ground. We are working on these follow up activities with the force to support PCSOs but it is apparent that two-way communication is necessary but not always happening, so I would urge Coordinators to make themselves known to their beat teams and make efforts to stay in touch with them, even as personnel may change. As with any partnership it takes sustained involvement to build productive and valuable relationships for the benefit of the community.

Turning to our finances, our Treasurer Keith Stokes prepared a financial report which was circulated to all members. Unfortunately, Keith is unable to attend the AGM but if there are any questions regarding our accounts, please email them to cheshirenw@outlook.com and we will respond. In essence we started the financial year with £938.20 in the bank and are ending it with £482.47. Our outgoings were spent on maintaining our website over the last 12 months. We registered CNWA as a cause with Easyfundraising.org.uk this year and publicised this with our members and supporters. So far, we raised £56.61 via this channel, and it will be credited to us in due course. If you shop online and haven't already registered with Easyfundraising, please do so and choose to support CNWA. This enables us to receive donations from online shopping companies at no cost to you or to us.

Finally, I'd like to say a big 'thank you' to all our volunteer Cheshire Coordinators and Neighbourhood Watch members for their work over the past year. Our organisation exists to represent and support you as you work with your neighbours and communities to keep them safe and reduce the fear of crime. We recognise that much of this effort is often unsung and un-recognised, but nevertheless contributes hugely to community cohesion and wellbeing. Thank you!

Heather Thompson
25th November 2023