

Have you ever thought about joining Surrey Heath's Neighbourhood Watch?



Neighbourhood Watch brings us closer to the people who live around us

The concept behind Neighbourhood Watch

Neighbourhood Watch rests on the concept of good neighbourliness. The basic idea is simple; neighbours join together to keep watch on each other's homes and their immediate surroundings, e.g. they may remove newspapers and milk bottles from front doorsteps where these are accumulating, especially during the holidays. They may also report suspicious persons and unusual events to the police.

Essentially it concerns crime prevention in the form of individuals acting together in an attempt to protect themselves and their property from criminal activity.

Starting a Watch can have many benefits. Our modern way of life means that the strength of many communities has been weakened. People can lead very isolated lives because of this and

live next door to neighbours for years without getting to know them.

Neighbourhood Watch ends this. It brings us closer to the people who live around us. It results in people looking after each other in a way that was more common in the past. It encourages us to take greater care of our families and possessions. It cuts the risk of people turning to crime and leaves us feeling safer. In short, it improves our quality of life.

In Surrey Heath, the Neighbourhood Watch Support Group acts as a link between the police, the borough council and Watch coordinators. They help establish new Watches, and keep records of Watches. Four times a year, they produce a newsletter called HeathWatch and host a coordinators' meeting normally with a guest speaker talking on a relevant subject.



Starting a new Watch

Since the first Neighbourhood Watch scheme was started in Cheshire in 1982, over 150,000 schemes have been set up, providing increased security and peace of mind for around seven million households.

In Surrey Heath there are over 240 Neighbourhood Watch schemes covering well over 8,000 homes. That is almost 30 per cent of the total households in the borough.

If you decide to start a Neighbourhood Watch scheme, you first need to contact your local area coordinator. They will be a member of the Surrey Heath Neighbourhood Watch Support Group, which works very closely with local police officers in the running of Neighbourhood Watch. Or you can contact the borough's crime reduction advisor (see contact details over).

Setting up

You will have to get the support of about 60 per cent of residents in your selected area to make the scheme viable. There is no recommended maximum or minimum number of members per Watch; it will depend on the area, its location and individual circumstances.

In Surrey Heath there are watches as small as 10 homes and as large as 300. It will be whatever forms a natural community. A house is vulnerable at the front, back and either side if it is detached, so not only should your street be involved, but those whose gardens back on to yours.

You may well need more than one coordinator for your Watch depending on its size.

What do Neighbourhood Watch schemes do?

Good schemes plan action to deal with the area's problems. Some projects can be done by members themselves; others need help from the council, police or other organisations.

You and the scheme members could help:

- Increase awareness of the need for crime prevention
- Explain how crime can be prevented
- Promote home security and other measures to reduce crime
- Encourage members to report suspicious activity to the police
- Support vulnerable people in the community and help them to avoid becoming victims
- Improve the environment to give people a sense of pride and discourage vandalism
- Create safe areas for children to play
- Promote property marking to deter theft and enable stolen property to be returned



How much will it cost?

The short answer is "very little". You may need some money to finance the booking of a venue or you could use a member's home. You may also want to produce a local newsletter but the support group publishes HeathWatch four times a year and will provide you with enough copies for all the households in your Watch.

Window stickers and leaflets on crime prevention are supplied free by the Home Office. You will be provided with enough for your Watch but more are always available.

The main expense used to be the supply and erection of the street signs. However, recently Surrey Heath Borough Council has agreed to supply and erect the signs at no cost to the new Watch. You must agree the number and position of the signs in consultation with the council, and maybe the police and your members. You will however have to make sure you have enough funds to pay for the replacement of any sign that may be stolen or vandalised.

If you live in a private, un-adopted road, the council will be unable to provide the signs free of charge.

Getting your Watch going

Once you have a nucleus of interested Watchers, arrange a meeting either in someone's home or local schools will normally let you hire a room at reasonable rates. A Surrey Police officer and a member of the support group will attend to explain what is involved and how the support group can help. They will give a brief introduction to Neighbourhood Watch; talk about specific crime problems in your area; advise on the physical security of homes; and tell you what to look for, i.e. what constitutes a suspicious person, vehicle or incident and explain how to report it. Normally they will need at least three weeks' notice of the meeting but please have an alternative date as they have other commitments.

It will require commitment and effort on the part of the coordinator, but the rewards are many. Above all, a drop in domestic burglaries and vehicle crime is to be expected.

Watch spin-offs

Another bonus could be a discount on household contents insurance. Some of the major insurance companies offer discounts to members of Watches so they clearly think it is a good idea. It is worth contacting your company to check.

Some of the Neighbourhood Watch 'spin-offs', which enrich the community, have been 'rotas' to look after the elderly or visit members' homes when they are away. Watches have also been effective in campaigning for things like better street lighting or a reduction in vandalism. But, of course, the main advantage is that they promote a more caring and concerned community with the knowledge that your home and area is as safe as you and your neighbours can help to make it.

For more information, contact:

Bill Allan
Frimley, Frimley Green, Mytchett,
Parkside and Heatherside
Tel: 01276 21949

Michael Morgan
St Paul's, Old Dean, Camberley Town,
St Michael's, Yorktown and Watchetts
Tel: 01276 66019

Mike Potter
Lightwater, Bagshot, Chobham, West End,
Bisley and Windlesham
Tel: 01276 474231

PC Debbie Reece
Crime Reduction Advisor
Camberley Police Station
Tel: 0845 125 2222/ 01483 631845