

Safer Neighbourhoods Teams

Practice Advice- September 2005

Guidance on Setting Up and Maintaining Neighbourhood Panels

What are Neighbourhood Panels?

As Safer Neighbourhoods teams engage with communities, through various methods such as meetings or contact points, the teams will gain an insight into the local community's crime and disorder concerns. In order to ensure that the work of each Safer Neighbourhoods team is focussed on resolving these problems each Safer Neighbourhoods team will require a process to involve local people to decide the priorities for their local Safer Neighbourhoods team to work on.

This process will be based on a seven-stage model that is summarised at **Appendix A**. The 5th stage in this process, public choices, is where decisions are made. At this stage each Safer Neighbourhood area/ward must establish a **Neighbourhood Panel**. This panel should be made up of local people whose role is to assess the local concerns, identified through community engagement and analysis, and establish priorities for policing in the Safer Neighbourhood area. The panel gives direction and local advice to the Safer Neighbourhoods team, although some priorities will require partners to take the lead.

The **Neighbourhood Panel** will decide the priorities for the area by examining the results of community consultation and research by police and partners. This will include taking account of results from public events and meetings where the community have voiced concerns. In addition to priority setting the neighbourhood panel should also be fully involved in deciding what type of action should be taken on their concerns and have an input to the problem solving approach.

Who should be the members of a Neighbourhood Panel?

The panel should be made up of local people who live and/or work in the area or are involved in charitable work or business and have a close connection with the area. These people could be identified through consultation activities carried out on the ward i.e. public meetings, 'have a say events' or questionnaires. Try to attract a wide range of people to ensure that the group is representative of the community. Some local 'leaders' will be useful but try to avoid the impression that you are just listening to the usual people who attend every meeting. Nominations might be made at public meetings/events to avoid any impression that the panel has been imposed or selected by the police. This will also ensure that a wide range of people can take part in prioritising and resolving local issues. An ideal size for the group would be about 10-12 people; too many could make it hard to reach agreement

As with many community groups some members will request a formal arrangement others will prefer a less structured approach. Whatever the system chosen for the panel meetings the participants must agree on how decisions will be made to prevent bias or personal opinions influencing the priorities selected by the group. Setting ground rules will be an essential part of the first meeting and must be shared with new members.

Record keeping should include minutes of the meeting with sufficient notes of the priorities agreed and the reasons for decisions (**Record keeping and Constitution see appendix B**). It should be clear to the community who the neighbourhood panel members are and how long the panel will be asked to serve the community. Members should aim to be involved for a year with an agreed tenure of 2/3 years maximum. A record should be kept of panel membership, including changes

of panel members. After establishing the panel it must be clear to members, and the community, how changes to panel membership will be made.

The chair of the group should be a community member with the Safer Neighbourhood sergeant in attendance at all meetings. As well as local people a local authority representative or other significant partner (youth worker or housing provider) may be involved as an observer to bring local knowledge and useful contacts to the panel. The neighbourhood panel may also benefit from the involvement of the local ward councillor who can observe the process and contribute their local knowledge of problems. The panel must decide if the councillor should have a role in deciding the priorities as their involvement may politicise the outcome.

How will panel members be chosen?

To start work with a community and set up a panel it may be useful for some existing community leaders to form an interim panel, possibly with a well known community leader taking the lead as chairperson. This should be a short-term arrangement until further community members volunteer. As more community members become involved the panel may develop by a process of nominations. If this approach is taken interim members should be kept involved once they leave the panel i.e by inclusion in the ongoing community consultation and engagement process.

The panel chair and panel members should be people who have the respect of the community and are trusted to voice their concerns. The panel members need to understand community concerns from a variety of perspectives and be able to feedback the results of police/partner activity and the reasons for priorities being set. This is why the panel needs to be as representative as possible. The panel should be a mixed group of men and women of various ages and be drawn from all parts of the neighbourhood to prevent focus on one area at the exclusion of others. Representation should be sought from significant race or faith groups in the area and people from different sections of the community i.e. those living in private dwellings and people from social housing. Consideration should also be given to the panel having a representative from any group forming a large section of the community such a students, young people, lesbians or gay men. Each team must also make plans to involve people with disabilities in community engagement and make the panel accessible to this section of the community.

If there are insufficient panel members new members can be generated by an advert in local publications, housing association newsletters or supermarket notice board. Alternatively consider an open invitation to specific groups or random invitations made in person at other community events or venues.

What are Neighbourhood Panel responsibilities?

The purpose of the neighbourhood panel is to agree a realistic and achievable course of action to address the issues raised by the community. The panel need to meet regularly, about every six weeks. The panel will assess the information collected by police and other sources and consider how to prioritise the community concerns. About three tasks for action should be agreed, with feedback being given at the next meeting. A communication strategy will also be required to keep the whole community informed of the priorities and the outcome of problem solving work. Police should ensure that the priorities are achievable within available resources, and set a timescale for achievement or feedback to the community. Partners may need to agree the level of their involvement.

The panel will review priorities agreed at previous meetings and monitor progress. When a priority has been resolved a new problem will be agreed. The panel will also adopt a problem

solving approach and encourage local action and multi agency work. Problem solving training can be given to panel members at a local level to help them understand how the community can become involved in solving problems.

How will the panel decide on priorities?

The community should set the priorities for the Safer Neighbourhoods Team with limited police influence. Once the community have been consulted about the problems in their area the information is considered by the neighbourhood panel who decide which issues are the most important and the way that the community would like the police to respond. The work of the panel will be made easier if the issues and concerns of the community are presented to them with some analysis. This may be as simple as a map showing the occurrences of a problem, or a ranking of the frequency of issues being raised.

The Safer Neighbourhoods/partnership analyst has a key role to play in this by presenting analysis on the community issues that were identified during consultation. Decisions may follow a simple process of discussion to reach consensus. If agreement is not reached then a vote may be taken or an extra priority agreed.

Neighbourhood Panels and work with partners and other agencies

Boroughs will have a variety of terms used for the group that brings together partners at borough level to co-ordinate tasking of neighbourhood problems to the most appropriate agency, partnership or policing unit. These may be called a **Joint Agency Group (JAG)**, **Partnership Operational Group** or may work as a borough level **Problem Solving Forum**. In each case the group brings together community safety partners such as the local authority, street wardens, housing managers and others who have a role to play in community safety. The Safer Neighbourhoods team will refer issues to this group for assistance and problem solving activity from partners.

In some boroughs JAG/problem solving/partnership operational group operate at a level covering two or more wards. These smaller groups may take a problem solving approach involving local people, including businesses or housing providers/landlords who can assist to resolve problems. This will enable work to be carried out at a very local level with partners who have a specific responsibility or take the lead for the local authority on a geographic basis, for instance a housing district or estate.

Information Sharing

As part of the process of involving communities in priority setting the panel may be given access to data and information. This information will be de-personalised and usually relate to broad crime types or information such as police call data or council services requests. This sharing of information does not require any information sharing protocol or agreement with panel members as long as the information does not identify any person as a victim offender or witness or contain private details about any person.

Members of the community will not normally be covered by exchange of information protocols. This means that police officers and staff should not share personal information that would identify a person with the community. If information sharing is required advice should be sought from BOCU SMT on the process for defining new information sharing protocols.

Will this panel affect existing police working groups i.e. Sector Working Groups?

In many boroughs Sector working groups (SWP) operate with existing community policing teams and have links within the consultative process as members of Community and Police Consultative Groups (CPCG). SWPs vary in size but usually cover large areas across many neighbourhoods/wards. As Safer Neighbourhoods teams develop the relationship between community and police will become more focussed on smaller geographic areas. Whilst there is only partial coverage of a borough with Safer Neighbourhood teams the SWP will still have a role as a form of consultation for non-Safer Neighbourhood areas. However as coverage becomes complete the role of the SWP will change or may become obsolete.

The options for the future of sector working groups include:

1. SWPs disband once the whole borough has Safer Neighbourhoods teams. (Consultation will be at ward/neighbourhood level through neighbourhood panels).
2. A gradual process with sections of the SWP breaking away and engaging with police in their local Safer Neighbourhood area. This would present opportunities to build trust through existing relationships. Neighbourhood panels might include a former SWP member for continuity.
3. SWP continues with a role of liaison with the Safer Neighbourhood Inspector. This group would identify issues that were common to a number of Safer Neighbourhood areas and work with police to raise these in wider forum and seek solutions, possibly at borough policing or Crime and Disorder Partnership level.

When considering the roles of neighbourhood panels and sector working groups it is important to consider how changes will affect other consultative process such as the Community Police Consultative Group (CPCG). On many boroughs each SWPs has a seat on the CPCG. Although including a representative from each neighbourhood panel would increase numbers at the CPCG it would ensure geographic representation, improve consultation and help increase diversity on CPCGs. Neighbourhood panels will also be a useful group for consultation by Crime and Disorder Partnerships and the MPS.

7 Steps to Community Engagement – The Role of the Neighbourhood Panel

Safer Neighbourhood 7 Steps	Role for Neighbourhood Panel
1. Research	Contribute any local knowledge or information about the community, such as contact details or organisations that may wish to be involved
2. Engage	Neighbourhood panel members can assist with meetings or activities by arranging them or helping with communication and publicity
3. Public Preferences	As above panel members can take an active role in gathering information on the issues that concern local people
4. Investigational and Analysis	Panel members can take part in visual audits of the neighbourhood and collate information from environmental surveys. At this stage the different community concerns are assessed and analysed by police and partners.
5. Public Choices	This is the key role for the neighbourhood panel. The panel assess the different concerns raised by community at public meetings or other consultation and decide which should be priorities. These should be choices that are informed by research and analysis from step 4
6. Plan and action	Panel may be involved in some of activity. Non-enforcement activity, such as communication with the community may be carried out by the panel to help publicise what is happening
7. Review	The panel should be part of the review process and agree when a priority has been completed or requires further work

This is cyclic process, return to step 1 after the first round of activity

Sample Agenda and Record Keeping

- Welcome and introductions
- Attendance and apologies for absence
- Record of attendees (including organisation they represent if applicable)
- Set time limit for the meeting and business to be discussed
- Agree minutes of last meeting & update on priorities agreed at last meeting
- Discuss current community safety issues requiring attention
- Agree which issues will be the next set of priorities. Record reason for choice, action to be taken and reason for the priorities being selected
- Any other business
- Agree time and date of next meeting

Sample Constitution

- Purpose of the Panel
- Terms of reference
 1. Be community representatives and to identify issues of local concern which have an impact on fear of crime or the quality of life in an area. Anything sub-judice or relating solely to an individual case will not be considered
 2. Assist police in community engagement
 3. Assist in problem solving and crime prevention activity
 4. Assist in environmental audits
 5. Review priorities at regular intervals
 6. Provide information to the community on progress of priorities
- Membership and attendance requirement
- Review of membership
- Meetings (frequency, location and record keeping)
- Nominations and elections for chair (process and timescales for holding the role)
- Members responsibilities (voluntary participation, promote inclusion and equality of opportunities)

The constitution may be signed and should be reviewed annually.