



# Neighbourhood WATCH

## Toolkit

### Module 4: Making your meetings more effective

This module looks at how to run and manage effective meetings.

By the end of this module you will be able to:

- identify good venues for meetings;
- set an agenda for meetings;
- manage meetings effectively; and
- select officers for your committee and allocate responsibilities to them.

#### Introduction

This module should help you to get more out of your Neighbourhood Watch meetings, whether they involve a few people in a private house or all of the group's members in the local school or church hall.



#### Stop and think

Think about some of the things we've all said about meetings at some time or another:

'I don't mind going to meetings but we don't seem to do anything. It just seems to be meetings for the sake of having meetings.'

'I don't mind giving up an hour or so but it was still going on when we left. We had to get the children to bed, and besides that the same things are just being repeated again and again.'

'Do you ever get the feeling that we're going to these meetings just to agree with what has already been decided?'



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'The caretaker suddenly appeared at the door - we'd run out of time. Trouble was that we hadn't got round to discussing the most important items.'

Many scheme members will attend or run meetings as part of their everyday work. The format and rules of meetings will be familiar to them. But there is a crucial difference between work meetings and Neighbourhood Watch meetings: work meetings are part of the job, while Neighbourhood Watch meetings are optional. If scheme members prefer to mow the lawn, do the ironing, go out with friends or stay at home and watch TV, they can do so.

So the Neighbourhood Watch meetings must win the competition for members' time. They will only do so if they are **worthwhile**, **interesting** and **enjoyable**.

The rest of this module looks at two important aspects of meetings that make them more attractive to the members:

- planning the meeting in advance
- managing the meetings.





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### Organising a meeting

A well-planned meeting will run more smoothly, and it will be more likely to please your members. The points below should help you to achieve this.

#### Do we need a meeting?

This should be your first question. Do you actually need a meeting?

Avoid having a meeting just for the sake of it - people lose interest if the meeting doesn't seem to have a purpose. They will feel that their time has been wasted.

However, it's important not to leave too much time between your meetings, otherwise people will start to lose interest in the scheme altogether.

So, how often you hold meetings is important. It's a balance between keeping the momentum going and ensuring that there is enough on the agenda for an engaging meeting.

#### Yes, we do need a meeting

Once you have decided that you do need a meeting, there are more decisions to take:

- Where should you hold the meeting?
- What's the best day and time?
- How long should it last?
- Who should attend?
- What should be discussed?

We'll look at these questions in turn.



#### Remember

Your meeting will only be a success if people want to come to it. Where and when you hold it, how it is run and what is discussed will influence their decision.



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### The venue

You have probably heard these complaints before:

'We were crammed in that room like sardines, half of us had to stand or sit on the floor.'

'The room was very nice but why did we have to go into town? Surely there's a suitable place on our own estate.'

'The school hall is very good but I'm frightened to death of walking up the dark driveway.'

From these, you can see that the venue must be:

- the **right size** for the number of people you expect to attend;
- **conveniently located**, either within walking distance of your audience or near a bus route (as not everyone will have a car); and
- **safe** - people won't want to reach the venue by walking up dark alleyways or along a badly lit road.

It's also important to consider **how the room is set out**. Remember the old school days with pupils in rows facing the teacher? Most of us associate this layout with being spoken 'at' as opposed to being spoken 'to'. You'll want your audience to participate in a more relaxed fashion; the way that the room is arranged can help them do this.

No matter how many people attend the meeting, you will get better results by arranging the seating in a circle. Sitting in a circle is much less formal and helps to make people feel that their opinions are welcomed.

### The date and time

Successful schemes are made up of a cross-section of the community. This makes choosing a suitable day and time more difficult, since different people have different demands on their time.

If meetings are planned far enough in advance and are well-organised, they should be well-attended. Here are some tips for scheduling meetings:



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- Set the dates of all meetings for the next six months or a year. This means that people can put them in their diaries and that you can book venues for the meetings in advance.
- Before setting the dates, find out which days are inconvenient or unpopular for meetings and avoid them. For example, Friday nights are best avoided.
- Bear in mind that people may be working during the day or may have young children. Make sure that the start time gives people the chance to get home from work, and that the finish time is not too late.
- Always try to start and finish the meeting on time.

### The content of the meeting

Every meeting should have a purpose - as we have discussed, there is no point in having a meeting just for the sake of it.

Always make sure that you are clear on what you want the meeting to achieve, and that the agenda is varied and interesting. It is likely to include presentations, discussions and administrative business.

Here are some useful points for running successful meetings:

- Have a **clear agenda** for the meeting - this makes it less likely that the meeting will be a 'talking shop' and also helps to keep people interested.
- Make sure that the **agenda is balanced**. Aim for a mixture of information items and action items, where decisions are taken about what can be done.
- Make sure that there is a system for **adding items to the agenda**. This means that everyone is able to raise an item that is important to them at the meeting.
- Arrange to have all the items for the agenda **submitted well in advance** - for example one week before the meeting. You can then distribute the agenda before the meeting. As well as reminding members that the meeting is taking place, this gives people time to prepare any papers needed for the meeting.
- **Distribute documents** and papers for agenda items before the day of the meeting. People need time to consider the information and think about any issues that they might want to discuss further.



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- If you are discussing an item that involves another organisation, ensure that either the relevant people can attend the meeting or that you have enough background information from them.
- When you agree a project or an issue to tackle, make sure that it is **not too ambitious** or general. Be realistic. Breaking the projects down into smaller tasks makes them easier to achieve. People will feel encouraged once they achieve a task, but discouraged if the project fails because it is over-ambitious.



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### A 'special' item

To help make your meeting more interesting, you could identify one 'special' item at each meeting. This could be a presentation from a guest speaker, or a DVD on an issue that people are interested in. It could be of general interest, or tied in to a particular point on the agenda. The item can always be followed by a discussion.

Useful guest speakers you could invite include:

- **police** - Neighbourhood Policing Officer; Community Safety Officer; other specialist police officer;
- **local authority officers** - Anti-social behaviour co-ordinator; Trading Standards officer; Highways Department officer; Environmental Health officer; Public Protection officer; housing officer; or
- **other organisations** - Fire Service; magistrates; Victim Support.

### The committee

The committee members take a leading role in running the scheme by arranging the meetings and making sure that they run smoothly. It is important to have a **chair**, a **deputy chair**, a **secretary** and a **treasurer** - each officer has a specific job to do.

Finding the right officers for the committee is not always easy.

### The chair and deputy chair

The chair and deputy chair make sure that meetings are run efficiently, that the agenda is followed and that speakers focus on priorities and don't stray off the subject. This includes:

- keeping an eye on the clock and making sure that the meeting makes the best use of the time available;
- maintaining order in the meeting;
- deciding points of order and other questions that need a decision at the time;
- having the discretion to give casting votes if a decision can't be made without them; and



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- ending the meeting when business has been completed.

Outside of the meetings, they should encourage all members of the committee to work together as a team.

### The secretary

The secretary provides the organisational backing to the committee. This includes:

- organising agendas (with the chair and deputy chair) for meetings;
- distributing documents relating to agenda items in advance of the meetings;
- taking notes of meetings to keep a record of any decisions made;
- sending the draft notes of the meeting to the chair and vice-chair to get them approved;
- sending copies of the approved notes to committee members before the next meeting; and
- making sure that copies of meeting notes are kept in a safe place.

It is important that notes of a meeting are available for anyone who attended it.

### The treasurer

The treasurer is responsible for the finances of the scheme. This job includes:

- making financial records;
- reporting on the state of finances;
- finding out about sources of funding for the scheme; and
- estimating the cost of projects the group might want to undertake.



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### Other committee members

As well as the officers listed above, the committee can have **ordinary members**. Their job is to support the chair, deputy chair, secretary and treasurer and to work on individual projects and one-off jobs.

It is useful to have other committee members as this stops the scheme from becoming too dependent on a few people. It is unfair to rely on the same people to do all of the work. Also, if any of those people are unavailable or opt out, the scheme can hit problems.



#### Stop and think

What type of person would be effective in these roles? Write down the qualities you would look for in your ideal candidates.

Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Deputy chair \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary \_\_\_\_\_

Treasurer \_\_\_\_\_

### Appointing committee members

People can be **nominated and voted** onto the committee, either as an officer or as an ordinary member. It is a good idea to have elections for the officers once a year - this gives different people the opportunity to get more involved and means that others can have a break!

Although the scheme's officers have a key role, any member of the scheme should be able to contribute or help with any task that the scheme has agreed to take on.



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### And finally...

Keep the committee small, simple and working.



#### Remember

It is better to succeed in small things than fail in large ones.



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### Practical activity: Improving your meetings

The aim of this activity is to help you review your Neighbourhood Watch meetings.

If you identify some bad points about your meetings, it is important not to concentrate on individual personalities. Instead, try to concentrate on how your scheme can be improved, not on what individuals may have done wrong.

#### 1 Identify what to change

Try and identify the good and bad points in your scheme's meetings. (Asking other members of the Scheme to give their opinions - anonymously, if they wish - may identify points you hadn't noticed.) The **checklist on page 13** will help to you consider the most important aspects of your meeting.

List the points in a table like the one below. For each point, try and find out why it is a good or a bad aspect of your meetings.

Make a separate list of possible areas for improvement.

#### Neighbourhood Watch meetings

What works well?	Why/how?
What could work better?	How?

When you have identified possible areas for improvement, write an **action list** of things you want to change.



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### 2 Implementing the changes

Once you've identified changes that need to be made to the way you run your meetings, you may need to discuss **how** to implement them with the scheme's other officers.

Then decide **when** each change should be put in place. For example, if you want to start having an agenda, this change could be made in time for the next meeting. However, if you need to elect officers this will be more complex, as you need to invite nominations and organise an election meeting.



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### Meetings checklist

	Yes	No
<b>The meeting</b>		
Do people attend the meetings?		
Do people contribute to the discussion?		
Do the meetings achieve their aims?		
<b>The venue</b>		
Is the venue the right size?		
Is the venue conveniently located?		
Is the approach to the venue safe?		
<b>The time</b>		
Do you have dates for meetings set in advance?		
Are your meetings on a convenient day?		
Do you have set start and finish times?		
Do your meetings finish on time?		
<b>The content of the meeting</b>		
Do you have an agenda for your meetings?		
Are papers distributed before the meetings?		
Is there a system for putting items on the agenda?		
Is there a good mix of different items on your agenda?		
Do you complete all the points on the agenda during the meetings?		
<b>Committee members</b>		
Does your scheme have a chair and deputy chair?		
Does your scheme have a secretary?		
Does your scheme have a treasurer?		
Does your scheme have ordinary committee members?		
Is everyone in your scheme aware of what each committee member is responsible for?		