

Report of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel

Neighbourhood Action Teams in North Lincolnshire

June 2009

The Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel role is to carry out the relevant overview and scrutiny functions relating to services being delivered by the council and its partners for cleaner, greener, stronger and safer communities, and associated transport and environmental matters. It also monitors the work of the Cabinet and individual Cabinet Members within these terms of reference.

This report is the end result of a review into a particular subject. It sums up how the review was carried out, the panel's findings, considerations, conclusions and recommendations for any improvements that could be made.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT

'Neighbourhood Action Teams in North Lincolnshire'

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Introduction by the Chair of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel

Neighbourhood Action Teams (NATs) have been up and running for over 2 years now and we are seeing a difference in our wards as a result. They were established to bring together agencies who, together would act as a catalyst for solving problems at a local level.

It is clear from colleagues that although NATs are seen as a great success, they are all operating differently; their Chair, their agenda, who attends, what is discussed, the list goes on. This has caused much confusion and debate.

While we must retain some flexibility between each NAT due to the diversity of our communities, we must also have some structure to enable our NATs to be as effective as they can be. However, what is clear from our findings is that our neighbourhoods may not be aware of the existence of NATs, their achievements and how to feed into the process. It is also clear that some communities are not as engaged as they could be.

We must improve our communication. We must involve people at a local level. We must act to tackle issues that are perceived to be the problems of our neighbourhoods, and to do that our communities must have a voice so we must improve in our methods to engage with local people to ensure that our issues are their issues.

I think NATs have been a great success. There is much enthusiasm from all parties to the NAT process. However, there is much room for improvement.

We have conducted many interviews and focus groups and I hope that we have spoken to everybody who is involved in the NAT process. Each and every member of a NAT was given the opportunity to give us their comments. I hope this review and our recommendations will go some way towards coordinating and making what is a good service, even better.

I would like to thank all members of the Panel for their commitment to what has been a very interesting, thought provoking and worthwhile review.

Councillor Andrea Davison

Chair, Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel

MEMBERSHIP OF THE SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

Councillors: A Davison (chair)
 R Waltham (current vice-chair) *
 M Ali
 S Armitage
 P Clark (previous vice-chair)
 T Ellerby
 T Foster

* Denotes change as from Annual Meeting of the Council May 2009, previous member of the panel who has contributed to this review is as follows: -

Councillor N Sherwood

GLOSSARY

This report is written as far as possible in plain English with the minimum of jargon. All acronyms are spelt out in full when they first appear but for the sake of clarity their meanings are repeated here.

SNAP	Safer Neighbourhoods Action Programme provides a mechanism for local people and partner agencies to work together in a coherent way to identify, prioritise and tackle those community safety issues which our neighbourhoods consider most important.
NLSP	North Lincolnshire Strategic Partnership is a non-statutory, multi-agency partnership, which matches local authority boundaries. The NLSP brings together at a local level the different parts of the public, private, community and voluntary sectors; allowing different initiatives and services to support one another so that they can work together more effectively.
NAT	Neighbourhood Action Teams are formed from representatives of the local community and other parties. The Team acts as a gateway for information to and from the community and plays a vital role in identifying and responding to local community priorities.
SNAT	Safer Neighbourhoods Area Teams operate on a wider area level, whereby senior practitioners from partner agencies meet regularly with NAT representatives as Safer Neighbourhood Area Teams (SNAT's) to assist in dealing with the most resistant problems.
NATAR	Neighbourhood Action Team Activity Record is a document which allows the NAT to record its actions. The document is also used to keep the SNAT informed of any outstanding issues at a NAT.
SARA	Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment is a well-proven method for identifying the root causes of local problems. More details are available from the Safer Neighbourhoods Website at www.saferneighbourhoods.net

1 THE SELECTION AND SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

The Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel's role is to monitor or examine services being delivered by the council and its partners for cleaner, greener, stronger and safer communities, and associated transport and environmental matters.

The panel agreed to conduct this review after undertaking its usual consultation process with Service Directors, Cabinet Members and other stakeholders for any policy or service areas that would benefit from independent overview and scrutiny members reviewing the service.

When drafting their work programme for 2008-09, members were universal in their concern that Neighbourhood Action Teams in North Lincolnshire were all operating differently. Such was their concern that if the Neighbourhood Action Teams continue in their current guise then Safer Neighbourhoods and Humberside Police would be left with a situation whereby only some wards were serviced by a Neighbourhood Action Team. An outcome that is unacceptable to North Lincolnshire residents. Consequently, the scrutiny panel agreed unanimously to conduct a review into Neighbourhood Action Teams in North Lincolnshire with a brief -

- (i) To determine if Neighbourhood Action Teams act as a catalyst for solving problems at a local level.
- (ii) To ascertain the level of commitment allocated to the Neighbourhood Action Teams by Safer Neighbourhood partners.
- (iii) To determine if the issues Neighbourhood Action Teams are trying to tackle are sufficiently resourced.
- (iv) To establish if a relationship exists between town and parish councils and the relevant Neighbourhood Action Team
- (v) To establish if Neighbourhood Action Teams utilise the appropriate methodology when problem solving at a local level.
- (vi) To determine whether Neighbourhood Action Team members raising the appropriate concerns of local residents?

2 HOW THE REVIEW WAS CARRIED OUT

The council's Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel –

- Agreed to carry out an intensive investigation into 'Neighbourhood Action Teams in North Lincolnshire'.

Desktop Research

Documentation including -

- Local and National press articles
- Wide range of websites and national journals were also used as part of the information collection process.

Interviews

Interviews were held with internal and external witnesses including -

- Councillor L Foster, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood, Environmental and Communities, North Lincolnshire Council
- Stuart Minto, Head of Safer Neighbourhoods, North Lincolnshire Council
- Bruno Watson, Deputy Head of Safer Neighbourhoods (Crime Reduction), North Lincolnshire Council
- Neil Laminman, Service Director Community Planning and Resources, North Lincolnshire Council
- Keith Ford, Service Director Neighbourhood and Environment, North Lincolnshire Council
- John Boff, Acting Neighbourhood Sergeant, Scunthorpe North, Humberside Police 'B' Division
- Jo York, Acting Neighbourhood Inspector, Scunthorpe North, Humberside Police 'B' Division
- James Mckellar Main, Neighbourhood Sergeant, Scunthorpe South, Humberside Police 'B' Division
- Elisabeth Staff, Neighbourhood Sergeant, Brigg and Wolds, Humberside Police 'B' Division

Focus Group

A Focus Group was held with the following group –

- Neighbourhood Action Team chairs

Questionnaire

- A questionnaire was sent out to all Neighbourhood Action Team members in North Lincolnshire.
- A questionnaire was also sent out to all Town and Parish Councillors seeking their views on Neighbourhood Action Teams.

Town and Parish Council

- Members of the panel attended the Town and Parish Council Liaison Meeting on 29 January 2009. A presentation was delivered to all the Town and Parish Council delegates who attended on the scrutiny review brief.
- Members of the panel were invited to attend a meeting of Brigg Town Council to discuss their withdrawal from the Brigg and Wolds Neighbourhood Action Team.

Neighbourhood Action Team Forum

- Members of the panel were invited to the Neighbourhood Action Team forum meeting on 24 February 2009. A presentation was delivered to all the Neighbourhood Action Team delegates who attended on the scrutiny review brief.

Panel Meetings

A series of public meetings were held for witness interviews and presentations, together with planning and evaluation meetings to consider information collated and presented to members.

Sub-groups made up of panel members also met to deal with urgent business in order for the review to proceed efficiently and effectively.

3 THE PANEL'S FINDINGS/CONSIDERATIONS

The programme of work carried out by the panel enabled members to use different techniques and perspectives to comprehensively examine the issue of Neighbourhood Action Teams in North Lincolnshire. The findings and considerations of the panel are outlined below.

Background

As the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership for North Lincolnshire, Safer Neighbourhoods recognises that whilst it has been capable of achieving performance targets set from the 'top down, historically the partnership may have done so at the expense of maintaining effective community engagement and tackling the range of issues which the public consider most important.

Consequently, the partnership created the Safer Neighbourhoods Action Programme (SNAP). The SNAP seeks to remedy this by providing a mechanism for local people and partner agencies to work together in a coherent way to identify, prioritise and tackle those community safety issues which our neighbourhoods consider most important.

The North Lincolnshire Strategic Partnership (NLSP) has put in place a framework for delivery of the Local Area Agreements that is based upon the 17 council wards that make up the 5 geographic wards. The NLSP referred to this as the 17-5-1 system.

The Vision

The aim of the SNAP is to bring together the community and partners in an unbroken communication framework which stretches from local residents to the NLSP. At a neighbourhood level, members of the community are provided with a variety of communication channels and engagement opportunities through which they can register concerns about safer and stronger community issues. With the support of Safer Neighbourhoods partners, key individuals from local neighbourhoods are able to meet regularly as Neighbourhood Action Teams (NAT's) to consider, prioritise and work together to resolve those issues.

On a wider area level, senior practitioners from partner agencies meet regularly with NAT representatives as Safer Neighbourhoods Area Teams (SNAT's) to assist in dealing with the most resistant problems.

Introduction to Neighbourhood Action Teams

Neighbourhood Action Teams operate at Electoral Ward level and are a key part of the SNAP and Neighbourhood Policing systems in North Lincolnshire. These in turn feed into the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership and the North Lincolnshire Local Strategic Partnership.

Formed from representatives of the local community and other parties, the NAT acts as a gateway for information to and from the community and plays a vital role in identifying and responding to local community priorities.

Primary Functions

The NATs primary functions are to:

- Receive information from the community about local issues, which affect community safety, community cohesion and the built environment.
- Prioritise those issues for action.
- Work with the local community and partners to resolve those issues
- Ensure the wider community are aware of the priorities and action through effective means

Key Activities

According to Safer Neighbourhoods, the key activities of the NAT are to:

- Exchange information with the community and other interested parties on issues relating to community safety, community cohesion and the built environment within the area of responsibility.
- Establish and maintain a mechanism for the setting of local priorities by local people.
- Influence action by the community and other bodies to contribute toward the identified community priorities.
- Develop and maintain the Neighbourhood Action Team Activity Record (NATAR).
- Undertake problem-solving activities using the Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment (SARA) problem solving method.
- Agree actions to be taken, by whom and by when.
- Report progress against agreed action plans.
- Establish, manage and support sub-groups as required.
- Identify and make use of local resources to tackle local problems.
- Seek external assistance to resolve local problems when necessary.

- Identify deficiencies in both outcomes and performance of those involved in delivering community objectives. This will include action to remedy poor performance, inappropriate outcomes or failure to achieve value for money.
- Actively communicate with the public in accordance with the Safer Neighbourhoods and other appropriate Communication Strategies.
- Ensure that local problems, which do not fall within the scope of the NAT, are referred to the appropriate body.
- Issues that are outside the ability to be resolved at the NAT level will be brought to the attention of SNAT or others.

Membership

Composition of Neighbourhood Action Teams will vary from place to place; however, representatives from the following groups have been invited to participate: -

- Elected Ward Councillors
- Town and Parish Councils
- Community Groups including:
 - Neighbourhood Watch Groups
 - Residents Associations
 - Youth Groups
 - Community Interest Groups
- Local Schools
- Local Businesses
- Humberside Police
- The Safer Neighbourhoods Hub
- Neighbourhood Management bodies
- Other individuals or agencies deemed appropriate by the Neighbourhood Action Team

Through their witness interviews; analysing, questionnaires, responses and using their own experiences of NAT meetings, members learnt that the attendance, or lack of it from various agencies, was a concern for both Chair's and members of NAT's.

However, many agencies are extremely committed to NAT's through their regular attendance. For example Neighbourhood and Environmental Services, North Lincolnshire Homes and Youth Services.

Attendance by Resident Associations, Neighbourhood Watch Groups etc is essential for the success of NAT meetings, especially in the urban areas where no Town or Parish Councils are in existence. Community representation at NAT meetings is essential, as otherwise local residents concerns may not be presented at the meetings.

Whilst it would be wrong to state that no local groups are engaged in the NAT process, attendance at meetings tended to be those individuals who had strong confident personalities. Much more work was required to engage with those groups who were either dis-engaged with NAT's or who had no knowledge of them.

NAT Member Contact Details

As part of the review, the scrutiny panel agreed to consult with all NAT members through a questionnaire. The aim of the questionnaire was to canvass NAT member's opinion on their meeting, with particular attention being paid to training, outcomes, processes and administration.

However, the scrutiny panel encountered problems with obtaining a definitive membership list for each NAT. Members consulted Safer Neighbourhoods who provided the scrutiny panel with their database of NAT members. However, after circulation of the questionnaire the members were informed that it was in fact Humberside Police who own all the 'key networks' for each NAT. This is the names, addresses and contact details for all attendees at the NAT.

Through attending NAT meetings, members learned that some NAT members had not received the scrutiny panel's questionnaire. The lack of clarity over which organisation had ultimate responsibility for NAT members contact details may explain why some NAT members did not receive their questionnaire.

It was the intention of the scrutiny panel to hold focus groups with NAT members. The scrutiny panel's questionnaire provided NAT members with an opportunity to inform the councillors if they wished to participate in a focus group. However, the response to the focus group was very disappointing indeed. It was therefore agreed that due to the disappointing response it would be impractical to hold a focus group with the NAT members.

Neighbourhood Watch Groups

Members learned that very few Neighbourhood Watch Groups are represented at NAT meetings. Neighbourhood Watch is not just about reducing crime – it is about building community spirit and good relations.

It brings local people closer together with common goals; to tackle crime and disorder and to keep an eye on each other's property. Their attendance at NAT's was therefore crucial.

There are over 150 Neighbourhood Watch Groups in North Lincolnshire. They are members of the Humberside Association of Neighbourhood Watch Groups (HANWaG) that is jointly funded by Humberside Police Authority and the four local crime and disorder reduction partnerships. Information about Neighbourhood Watch Groups is held on a database for the use of HANWaG and Humberside Police. HANWaG employs a development officer in each of the four areas to support the Neighbourhood Watch Groups network and its members is kept as up to date as possible.

Neighbourhood Watch Groups are very important partners in the Neighbourhood Action Team process. They work closely with residents and know what the community safety issues are in their immediate local area better than most. They are also a very effective way in which some of those problems can be addressed. For those reasons they are potentially very important to the 17 ward-based Neighbourhood Action Teams. On that basis, the Safer Neighbourhoods Action Programme includes all Neighbourhood Watch Group Co-ordinators as invited members of the relevant NAT. However, until such time as Neighbourhood Watch Group Co-ordinators do become regular attending members, the NAT is able to approach them through the HANWaG development officer who will use the HANWaG database to ascertain contact details.

Members discovered that HANWaG recently conducted a 'mapping' exercise to identify the location of all Neighbourhood Watch Groups in North Lincolnshire. However, members had concerns about the accuracy of the data.

Members were also concerned about the lack of available accurate data on the names and addresses of Neighbourhood Watch Group co-ordinators. Without access to this data, NAT Chairs are unable to engage with the co-ordinators to ensure that at the very least, any issues they had in their locality could be brought to the NATs attention.

Safer Neighbourhoods state that in order to maintain meetings at a manageable size, NATs should ideally be no larger than about 15 people. Other than those individuals stated previously, representatives from partner agencies would not routinely attend some NATs (since a commitment to attend over 100 NATs each year is beyond the capacity of most partner bodies). They may be invited to attend particular meetings where their presence would assist in the resolution of specific issues.

Due to the nature of discussions, meetings are not open to members of the general public or the press but individuals have attended at the Broughton and Appleby NAT only. Members of the scrutiny panel, as well as NAT members and Humberside Police officers were surprised to learn that it was possible for members of the public to attend and speak at NAT meetings.

The Safer Neighbourhood Action Programme states that the Chair of the NAT may wish to open the first part of the meeting to members of the public in order to provide an opportunity for the wider community to raise issues and concerns. Members learned that only two NAT's had adopted this practice. However, the panel's focus group with NAT Chairs identified that very few Chairs were aware of this facility.

Members of the general public (and indeed some NAT members) may be excluded from discussion of certain sensitive issues where legal constraints on information sharing preclude discussions taking place outside the scope of formal information sharing agreements.

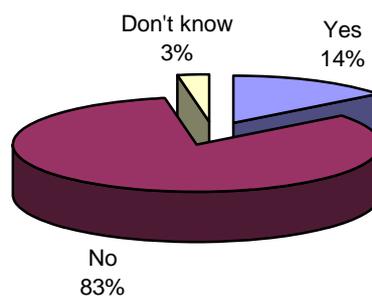
Senior Police Officers and Safer Neighbourhoods Hub staff have an open invitation to all Safer Neighbourhoods Action Programme meetings.

Training

Prior to their appointment to each NAT, the over arching comment from NAT members was that they felt unprepared and unqualified to undertake the role that they were being asked to fulfill.

Of those NAT members who completed the scrutiny panel's questionnaire, a staggering 83% of respondents stated that they had received no training prior to their appointment on to the NAT, whilst only 14% of NAT members had received some form of training.

Table One demonstrates NAT member's response to the question on whether they received any form of training prior to being invited to join their local NAT?

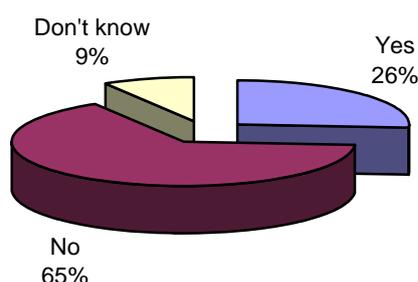


Training for NAT members has also been non-existent since their launch almost two years ago. Safer Neighbourhoods have held various NAT events, which are very well attended. However, they are more of an awareness raising session as opposed to specific training events.

This may be one reason why all NAT's appear to operate differently.

The scrutiny panel was also alarmed to discover that 65% of members had received no documentation from Safer Neighbourhoods on the role, remit and expectations of NAT members as well as procedures and terms of reference to be followed by each NAT.

Table Two demonstrates NAT member's response to the question on whether they were provided with any paperwork from Safer Neighbourhoods prior to their appointment on their local NAT i.e. terms of reference/constitution etc?



Team Officials

In order to ensure that meetings run smoothly and that NAT business is conducted as efficiently as possible, 4 key officials support every NAT:

- The Chair
- The Facilitator
- The NAT Organiser
- The Area Safer Neighbourhoods Officer

The Chair

The NAT Chair is responsible for the conduct of meetings and the overall leadership of the team.

Safer Neighbourhoods state that ideally, an elected Ward Councillor for the area of operation will chair NAT's because:

- They have democratically secured a mandate from local people to represent the whole ward area (the boundary of which is co-terminus with the NAT boundary).
- They can be subject to a legally enforceable information sharing agreement and are therefore eligible to represent the NAT at the Safer Neighbourhoods Area Team (SNAT) level.

However, members learned that Town and Parish Councillors chaired three NAT meetings. Whilst this was not what Safer Neighbourhoods envisaged, members were made aware that each NAT chaired by a Town or Parish Councillor operated in an efficient, productive and inclusive manner and their appointment was not at the detriment of their respective NAT.

Safer Neighbourhoods envisaged that the Chair would be a volunteer who is selected by the unanimous agreement of all Ward Councillors representing that area. However, the panel learnt that how Chairs came to be appointed varied quite considerably from one NAT to another. Some Chairs were appointed by their NAT, whilst others were asked by Safer Neighbourhoods to fulfill the role of Chair.

However, members were unaware of any Chair that had stood for re-election on an annual basis.

The Chair may be assisted by a Vice Chair who will be a team member selected by the NAT.

The Facilitator

Given the varied nature of NAT discussions and the fact that these discussions often take place in the absence of professional partner agencies, it was helpful for the NAT Chair to be assisted by an individual who has a wide knowledge of community safety issues and a good understanding of partner capabilities and service delivery mechanisms.

The Facilitator assists the Chair by helping to move discussions along and by adopting a lead role in priority issue selection and problem solving exercises.

The Facilitator is familiar with a wide range of facilitation tools and methods so that they can help to gain the most value from meetings. The Facilitator might be an officer from the Safer Neighbourhoods Hub or a suitably experienced person from the Police, a partner agency or from the community.

It was the intention that as the system develops, more people will be capable of fulfilling this role so that NATs may be facilitated by members of the public from varying backgrounds.

The NAT Organiser

The NAT Organiser is responsible for ensuring that NAT meetings 'happen'. They are responsible for putting in place the administrative arrangements. These responsibilities include:

- The booking of and payment for meeting venues.
- The sending of meeting invitations.
- The taking of meeting notes and the distribution of meeting summaries.

- The administrative maintenance of the Neighbourhood Action Team Activity Record (NATAR).
- The preparation of the NATAR for the Safer Neighbourhoods Area Team.

Safer Neighbourhoods envisage that the NAT Organiser is normally the Police Constable assigned as the Neighbourhood Officer for the area of operation. They may recruit the assistance of an administrator to assist with the administrative function but they retain organisational responsibility.

It was this issue that divided Safer Neighbourhoods Officers, Humberside Police Officers and NAT members.

Safer Neighbourhood Officers were unanimous in that Humberside Police Officers should be responsible for all the administration arrangements associated with NAT meetings. However, this did not happen at all NAT meetings, with a whole range of NAT members assisting the Police Officers, from making refreshments to taking minutes of meetings for example.

Humberside Police Officers were also split on how “involved” they should be. Some Police Officers wanted complete control of their respective NATs. However, other Police Officers wanted to be heavily involved in their meeting, without having the time consuming and often problematic role of booking rooms and arranging refreshments. Humberside Police Officers were in complete agreement, however, that they should control the “key networks” associated with each NAT, for example, names, addresses and circulation of papers to NAT members as this formed part of and assisted their neighbourhood policing role.

NAT members were also divided on the role of Humberside Police Officers when attending NAT meetings. Many NAT members who completed the scrutiny panel’s questionnaire believed that Humberside Police Officers should not be undertaking the role of minute taker, as this was not an efficient use of their resources. However, some NAT members were unsure as to whose role it actually was to record the minutes or to book the rooms for NAT meetings. This lack of clarity over the roles associated to each NAT was quite common.

The one group who were unanimous in their views on the role of Humberside Police was Town and Parish Council respondents to the scrutiny panel’s questionnaire. They were emphatic in their view that Police Officers should not be asked or indeed be undertaking any administrative arrangements associated with NAT meetings.

Members learned that the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership made funding available to Neighbourhood Policing Teams to cover meeting administration costs for NATs. This sum was to cover the cost of the room booking, refreshments, postage etc. The sum was also to remunerate any NAT member that had agreed to be the “minute taker” for their respective NAT.

In addition, the Area Safer Neighbourhoods Officer would assist the Facilitator by coordinating activity against actions with the appropriate partner/service provider irrespective of their attendance, arranging attendance of partners at NAT meetings when appropriate and updating actions.

Team Responsibilities

The NAT is accountable for its performance to the Safer Neighbourhoods Strategy Board through the Safer Neighbourhoods Area Team.

It has responsibility for ensuring that any resources allocated to it are targeted at achieving the objectives directed by the local community.

Membership Responsibilities

Membership of the NAT brings with it responsibilities. These are identified below and are essential to the well being of the NAT, its ability to be effective and held to account, whilst investing in it the authority to act.

- Members would be expected to have the right to make decisions on behalf of their organisation or group to ensure delivery of actions in response to community priorities.
- Deputising is acceptable, but wherever possible, deputies should retain the right to make decisions on behalf of their organisation.
- Attendees recognise that two successive non-attendances would lead to a review of NAT membership.

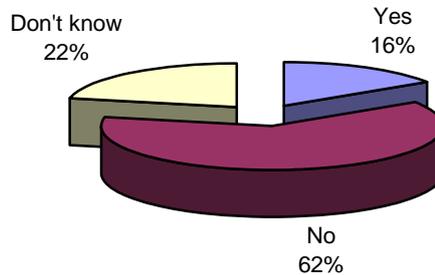
Problem Solving at NAT's

The Safer Neighbourhoods Action Programme states that a key activity of each NAT is to develop and maintain the Neighbourhood Action Team Activity Record (NATAR) as well as undertake problem solving activities using the Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment (SARA) problem solving method.

The NATAR allows the NAT to record any problems in its area, where and when the problems occur and who is the contact for the problem. The NATAR allows the NAT to build a portfolio of the problems in its area, as well as keep the Safer Neighbourhoods Area Team informed of the problems in each NAT.

However, the scrutiny panel learned through NAT members returned questionnaires that they were emphatic (62%) in their response that they were not aware of the existence of the NATAR or had been asked to complete the form. Clearly this was of concern to the scrutiny panel as the NATAR is a fundamental recording document, which can be used for a whole host of reasons.

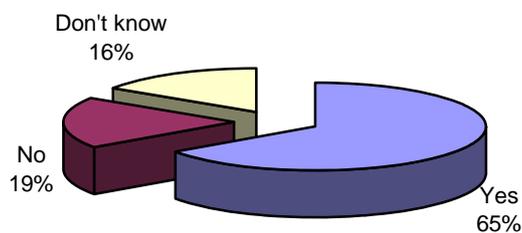
Table three demonstrates member's response to the question on have they, or their NAT, ever completed a Neighbourhood Action Team Activity Record (NATAR)?



NAT members also have access to the SARA problem-solving tool. The SARA is internationally recognised and is of use to crime reduction practitioners in any field as applying the process can ensure that a crime problem is effectively identified and tackled, avoiding any waste of time and resources if only part of the actual problem is identified.

NAT members were aware of the SARA and its role in assisting them in tackling crime issues in their ward. However, the application of the SARA was very inconsistent across all NAT's, with only 65% & of respondents to the scrutiny panel's questionnaire stating that their NAT utilised the SARA. NAT chair's, NAT members, Safer Neighbourhood Officers and Humberside Police Officers all had a different explanation as to why the SARA was an under utilised tool. This inconsistency concerned the members of the Panel.

Table four below demonstrates member's response to the question on has their NAT undertaken problem solving activities using the SARA problem solving method?



Relationship with Town and Parish Councils

Town and Parish Councils have a duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to consider the crime and disorder implications when exercising their functions and do all that they reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in their area.

As a thematic body assisting in developing safer and stronger communities under the auspices of Safer Neighbourhoods, the Partnership believes that the Neighbourhood Action Team is a perfect vehicle for Town and Parish Councils to raise their community safety issues and by their active participation in NAT activities, to demonstrate that they are indeed doing all they reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in their area.

The NAT has a strong community safety focus and is supported by officers with significant crime reduction expertise. Safer Neighbourhoods state that it is likely that the NAT can have a greater positive effect on removing or reducing serious or persistent community safety problems than the Town or Parish Council could when acting alone.

However, through completing the scrutiny panel's questionnaire, many Town and Parish Council's expressed their disappointment that Humberside Police Officers do not now attend Town and Parish Council meetings as regularly as they did prior to the creation of NATs. However, it was partly for this very reason that NATs were created, in order to free up Humberside Police officer's time.

The scrutiny panel was informed that Brigg Town Council had ceased its participation in the Brigg and Wolds Neighbourhood Action Team. The Town Council was concerned that the Brigg and Wolds Neighbourhood Action Team was at risk of becoming an arena where discussion that has taken place and perhaps not yet been resolved through other arenas, was unnecessarily duplicated to no good effect. The Town Council was equally concerned that this was another forum that drains the time and resources of the local policing team, and indeed officers of North Lincolnshire Council, that could be better directed elsewhere.

Town and Parish Councillors were also critical that actions agreed at NATs were not reported to the relevant Town and Parish Council for information. Perhaps more concerning was that some Town and Parish Councillors were unaware of the role and responsibility of a NAT.

Safer Neighbourhoods Project Teams

The Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership often commissions multi-agency Project Teams to undertake pieces of joint working on specific issues for a fixed period of time.

Whenever a Project Team is operating in a NAT area, it is the responsibility of the Project Team lead to make contact with the NAT and to keep it informed of Project Team activities.

Frequency of NAT meetings

Neighbourhood Action Teams are free to determine the frequency of meetings appropriate to their area but meetings should be held at least quarterly.

Members learned that there was no 'one size fits all' in relation to meeting frequency. However, the urban NATs did appear to meet more frequently than the rural NATs. This was of concern to the scrutiny panel as successfully utilising the SARA would be more difficult if the NAT only met on a quarterly basis.

The Approved Consultation Mechanism

It is unrealistic to assume that there will be representation from every community member at a NAT meeting. Therefore, NAT's must rely upon the existing engagement tools including surveys, voluntary groups and activity, Police Authority meetings, etc. The primary function of a NAT is to solve problems wherever possible and to seek support from the SNAT when an issue is outside the scope of the NAT.

By capitalising on the experience, expertise and knowledge of the wide range of organisations throughout North Lincolnshire, Safer Neighbourhoods can increase the level of engagement with residents. Strong, sustainable methods of engagement will create an accurate picture of the issues affecting the community and help to increase the function of the NATs.

The Approved Consultation Mechanism is a method of identifying community issues through partner engagement activity. Information can be gathered from, for example, a Residents Association - that may not wish to be involved in a NAT - and then filtered by an approved representative from the group and brought to a NAT meeting. The outcome of the issue and how it is addressed at the NAT will then be fed-back by the approved representative.

The filtration process might involve certain questions being asked such as: -

- Is it appropriate for the NAT, for example, if certain individuals or families are involved?
- Can/should it be problem solved by the NAT?
- Is the issue deemed most urgent by the particular group?
- Can an action update be reported back to the group?

The Approved Consultation Mechanism should be the key process used for information sharing for all partner engagement methods.

Communication/Information Sharing Methods

As described previously, an approved representative from a particular group can be a method of communication and information sharing to and from a NAT.

Meeting summaries can also be used as evidence of issues being addressed at the NAT. The summaries can then be sent to the originator if an approved representative is unavailable.

Other methods of sharing information such as e mail, telephone or direct contact can be made with a NAT representative to communicate information. In this case it is important that the issue raised is recorded in the meeting summary even if it can't be addressed by the NAT.

Police Authority Panel Meetings

Members were made aware that following discussions with Humberside Police in B Division it was acknowledged that Police Authority public consultation has a major part to play in the new NAT's structure in North Lincolnshire. Also, that the product of consultation so far facilitated by the Police Authority should be fed directly into the NATs via Neighbourhood Policing Team Inspector and that the NATs should send representation to the public forums.

The role of the Police Authority would be to organise, administer and facilitate consultative forums mirroring the Neighbourhood Policing Districts [Barton and District, Brigg and District, Isle of Axholme, Scunthorpe North and Scunthorpe South] of North Lincolnshire and feed the product of this consultation into the Neighbourhood Action Teams in order to influence the priority setting process at a local level.

In their opinion, Town and Parish Councillors, in particular, were critical that the NAT meetings merely duplicated the Police Authority Panel Meeting, therefore, attendance at both meetings was not an efficient use of Police resources.

NAT Open to the Public

Members of the scrutiny panel, as well as NAT members and Humberside Police officers were surprised to learn that it was possible for members of the public to attend and speak at NAT meetings.

The Safer Neighbourhood Action Programme states that the chair of the Neighbourhood Action Team may wish to hold an open session with members of the public prior to the main NAT meeting to provide an opportunity for the wider community to raise issues and concerns.

The resident's would be allowed to raise community safety issues and will then be given a brief explanation of how the issue will be prioritised.

The resident's contact details would be taken and an agreed method of communication would be used to follow up on any activity relating to their issue. At this point any members of the public who are not agreed NAT members will be asked to leave and the regular meeting will commence.

As was explained earlier, members were concerned that not all members of the community were represented at the NAT. And, as members of the public were not allowed to attend or speak at the main meeting either, it was difficult for each NAT to claim that they are working on behalf of their community.

Too often an assumption was made that as members of the community are not forthcoming to the NAT with their problems then more than likely they don't have any. Members of the public do have access to the Humberside Police Authority meetings, which are held in every ward and are open to the public. Duplicating this process at a NAT would not be an efficient use of resources. However, what alarmed the members was the lack of knowledge or understanding of the NAT process, not only from members of the public, but Town and Parish Councillors too.

Councillor Call for Action

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) for both local government matters and for crime and disorder matters came into force in April 2009. This was as a result of the Government implementing the provisions for a CCfA as detailed in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. CCfA gives councillors a new right to raise matters of local concern with their council's overview and scrutiny committee. This provides councillors with the opportunity to ask for discussion at scrutiny committees on issues where local problems have arisen and where other methods of resolution have been exhausted. Overview and scrutiny committees can then decide whether to use their powers to investigate the issue.

CCfA is therefore a valuable tool in equipping councillors to act as powerful advocates for the communities they serve and to strengthen still further their role as community champions. Councillors will of course continue to resolve issues informally, as they do now. But where they are not satisfied that real action has been taken to resolve the issue they have raised, they have the ability to ask the overview and scrutiny committee to take the matter further.

However, before an overview and scrutiny committee considers a local issue, the councillor should attempt to resolve the issue by any means necessary. This may consist of discussing the issue with services/partner agencies, facilitating informal discussions, raising issues with Neighbourhood Action Teams or raising issues formally with partner agencies.

The NAT would only become involved in the issue if it represents genuine local community concerns and it should focus on neighbourhood and ward issues.

4 THE PANEL'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the evidence presented and evaluated during this investigation, as detailed in the panel's findings and considerations, the conclusions and recommendations of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel are as follows: -

Neighbourhood Action Teams

Members learnt that very few NAT members had received an induction on the role and concept of a Neighbourhood Action Team prior to their appointment. It's therefore hardly surprising that in the early stages in the development of the NAT they were bestowed with problems. Very few NAT members had received any form of training, nor had they been provided with any paperwork or had the NATAR or SARA problem-solving tool explained to them. NAT's have only been successful due to the commitment and enthusiasm shown by all partners in the process. Without this, the NAT's would surely have failed.

Recommendation 1 That as a matter of urgency, the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership provide training to all NAT members on the key roles, responsibilities and expectations of a NAT. This training to be provided on an annual basis.

Constitutional Arrangements

Due to the fragmented way NATs were launched, it came as no surprise to the members of the panel that each NAT operated completely different. Some NAT's followed the constitutional arrangements in the SNAP document to the letter, whilst other NAT's didn't follow the guidelines in the SNAP at all. The members acknowledge that each NAT is evolving at a different rate. However, the scrutiny panel believes that it is essential that Safer Neighbourhoods and Humberside Police devise a model constitution that each NAT should follow.

The members are not suggesting that NAT's lose their flexibility to run the meeting in a way that works for their members. However, the meeting must be structured consistently with all seventeen NAT's so that any partner attending a meeting can easily integrate into the NAT.

Recommendation 2 That the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership produce a comprehensive constitutional framework (including a summary document) for use by all seventeen Neighbourhood Action Teams to ensure that they all operate to similar terms of reference.

As was explained earlier, very few NAT members had received any sort of documentation detailing what the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership's expectations of them as a NAT member were.

Those that had received a copy of the Safer Neighbourhoods Action Programme document would still have been none the wiser on the process as the document was very complex and drawn-out.

Recommendation 3 That the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership issue all NAT members with a copy of the constitutional framework, as well as no more than a two page briefing paper on the key terms of reference for the NAT.

Communication

The members were concerned about the lack of communication that exists between NAT members themselves, between NAT members and Town and Parish Council's, between NAT's and the community they serve and between the NAT and SNAT.

Humberside Police control the 'key networks' for each NAT. This is the names, addresses and contact details for all attendees at the NAT. The reason for this is due to data protection legislation. However, this does little to encourage communication between NAT members outside of the meeting. Whilst the members do not wish to contravene data protection legislation, they would like to see NAT members encouraged to voluntarily share their contact details with NAT members to aid communication.

Recommendation 4 That the Chair of each Neighbourhood Action Team ask their members if they would be willing to voluntarily share their contact details with their NAT colleagues.

Recommendation 5 That Humberside Police be asked to review the membership of each NAT on an annual basis to ensure that all contact details are up to date and that the membership of the NAT is fit for purpose.

Members were informed that some Town and Parish Council's were increasingly frustrated that they were not being kept up-to-date with discussions and actions agreed at the NAT. More often than not this was as a result of the Town or Parish Councillor not providing feedback to their council. This disappointed the Scrutiny Panel. However, the members believe that it can be easily rectified.

Recommendation 6 That the Service Director Legal and Democratic write to all Town and Parish Clerks asking them to include a standard item on every meeting agenda titled 'Neighbourhood Action Team – update and actions' in order to keep Town and Parish Councillors informed of the nature of discussions held and actions agreed at NAT's.

Members of the Scrutiny Panel were concerned about the knowledge and understanding of the NAT process that existed within the communities they serve. The NAT's are designed to represent the community.

However, members of the public are in the main excluded from participating in the process, except for the Broughton and Appleby NAT, which allows members of the public to attend, speak and observe their meetings. It is therefore open to interpretation as to whether representatives of Neighbourhood Watch Groups and Resident Associations can sufficiently represent their community.

Members believe that much more must be done to inform and encourage members of the public to engage in their local Neighbourhood Action Team.

At the Safer Neighbourhoods Strategy Board meeting on 24 June 2009, North Lincolnshire Homes and Voluntary Action North Lincolnshire very kindly offered the use of their respective newsletters as a communication tool to inform the wider community of the NAT concept.

Recommendation 7 That Safer Neighbourhoods and Humberside Police devise a communication strategy with the aim of informing every resident in every ward of the concept, aim and contact points for every NAT, utilising North Lincolnshire Homes and Voluntary Action North Lincolnshire newsletters.

The scrutiny panel also endorsed the suggestion that North Lincolnshire Council's Media Relations department be asked to include a feature on Neighbourhood Action Teams in its monthly magazine *direct*, informing the residents of North Lincolnshire of the concept of NAT's and how they can have an issue discussed at the meeting.

Recommendation 8 That North Lincolnshire Council's Community Planning and Resources service be asked to include a feature on NATs in a future edition of *direct* magazine. Follow up articles to promote the excellent work being undertaken by NAT's should also be considered.

In addition, the Safer Neighbourhoods website had very little information on NAT's on any of its pages. Clearly this was a missed opportunity to sign post visitors to the site to their local NAT should they have any issues of concern in their community. Likewise, Humberside Police's web site had very little information on NAT's in North Lincolnshire.

Recommendation 9 That the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership and Humberside Police be asked to revise their web sites in order to signpost visitors to information and contact points for their local NAT.

In addition, more work is required to engage with the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities as well as new communities to ensure their views are presented to the NAT.

Recommendation 10 That North Lincolnshire Council's Community Planning division be asked to engage with all Neighbourhood Watch Groups, Resident Associations and members of the BME communities as well as new communities to encourage them to participate in the NAT process.

The SNAP does allow for an 'open forum' session prior to the NAT starting, whereby members of the public are allowed the opportunity to speak to NAT members. However, the document is specific in that members of the public are not to be present for the main meeting. Members of the panel were in agreement that due to the nature of the discussions held at NAT's, members of the public should not be invited to participate.

Recommendation 11 That all NAT Chairs be reminded that members of the public are not to be invited to participate in the main meeting. However, they are free to attend the open forum session prior to the NAT meeting, when they are held.

Some members' were concerned over the lack of communication between NAT's and SNAT's. Information that is collected and presented as either a SARA or NATAR that requires SNAT intervention is not being fed back to the NAT once the SNAT has met and agreed how it will resolve the issue. As only the NAT chair attends the SNAT, it is important that the NAT Chair ensures that they keep their members informed of the actions that were agreed and the progress being made against those actions.

Recommendation 12 That the NAT Organiser be asked to include a standard item on every meeting agenda titled 'Safer Neighbourhoods Area Team – update on referred actions' in order to keep all NAT members informed of the nature of discussions held and actions agreed at SNAT's.

Strengthening the Neighbourhood Action Team Process

Ensuring that the right people are involved in their teams is in most cases the critical first step. In this respect, one of the identified areas needing development has been the relatively patchy involvement of Neighbourhood Watch Group Co-ordinators in the Neighbourhood Action Team process. This has also been recognised by HANWaG, who seek to encourage increased participation through circulars such as the *HANWaG Herald*.

However, members are also concerned about the coverage of the Neighbourhood Watch Group network. Safer Neighbourhoods have recently commissioned an exercise on mapping, street by street, which parts of North Lincolnshire are covered by an active group. This is helping to inform Neighbourhood Action Teams where significant gaps exist in relation to crime trends and local concerns – and where development is needed. This might involve the establishment of new groups, or the agreement of existing groups to extend their area of coverage.

The Safer Neighbourhoods Strategy Board (SNSB), at its meeting on 24 June 2009, agreed a series of recommendations aimed at strengthening the relationship between NATs and Neighbourhood Watch Groups. The SNSB agreed -

- (i) That the Strategy Board endorses the principle of strengthening the relationship between North Lincolnshire's Neighbourhood Action Teams and Neighbourhood Watch Groups;
- (ii) To endorse the proposal that Neighbourhood Action Teams should have an overview role with regard to effectiveness of the Neighbourhood Watch Group network in their ward area;
- (iii) That this overview role should include both assessing the capacity of existing groups and recommending where additional provision is needed;
- (iv) That all existing and future groups automatically be members of the appropriate Neighbourhood Action Team; and
- (v) To authorise discussions to take place with HANWaG over incorporating the Strategy Board's views within a future service level agreement.

Recommendation 13 That the members of the panel fully endorse the decisions made by the Safer Neighbourhoods Strategy Board at its meeting on 24 June 2009 with regard to Neighbourhood Watch Groups, and hope that the actions will be implemented as soon as possible.

Humberside Police

Members were incredibly impressed with the commitment shown to NAT's by Humberside Police B Division officers. Such was their commitment that Police Sergeants were known to be taking the minutes of some meetings.

However, members of the panel and surveyed NAT members were of the opinion that this was not an efficient use of resources for B Division officers. It's essential that all NAT members needed to be "doers" i.e. be practical in their participation, as NATs were not designed to be talking shops. It was the member's belief that Police Officers were being restricted in their participation as they were tasked with taking minutes of the meetings.

Recommendation 14 That the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership undertake a review of the administrative arrangements of all NAT's with the aim of removing the administrator position from Humberside Police officers.

Members were surprised to learn that more often than not, Humberside Police's public priorities for a ward were different to those priorities agreed by the NAT.

This could cause confusion for both parties as it was unclear which set of priorities were to receive precedence. However, more often than not the NAT priorities were not crime related issues but environmental concerns. It was therefore understandable why the Police's priorities were different to those of the NAT.

Recommendation 15 That Humberside Police and the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership consider publishing both the Police and NAT ward priorities alongside each other to reflect the main concerns of both parties.

Dis-engaged Members of NATs

Members heard that the most high profile party to withdraw from the NAT process was Brigg Town Council. As was explained on page 22, the Town Council was concerned that the Brigg and Wolds Neighbourhood Action Team had become an arena where discussion that has taken place and perhaps not yet been resolved through other arenas, was unnecessarily duplicated to no good effect. The Town Council was equally concerned that this was another forum that drains the time and resources of the local policing team, and indeed officers of North Lincolnshire Council, that could be better directed elsewhere.

However, this point of view was not shared by any other Town or Parish Council.

Recommendation 16 That the Head of Safer Neighbourhoods open dialogue with Brigg Town Council in order to re-integrate the council back into the NAT process.

Managing Demand

The scrutiny panel was concerned that the operation of seventeen NAT's generates considerable demand on all the partners who attend the meetings. A key issue therefore is how to manage partner engagement as attendance at every NAT meeting is impractical. This is of particular concern to NAT members as some wards have fantastic consistent attendance by a whole host of partners, whilst some NAT's have little or no attendance at their meetings by partners. This inequality is clearly unacceptable.

Recommendation 17 That the Safer Neighbourhoods Officers contact all partner agencies requesting a designated contact and nominated substitute who will be responsible for attending each NAT.

Members' were surprised to hear from NAT chairs that there was no consistency with the frequency of meetings. Some NAT's met monthly, whilst others met every three months. Whilst the scrutiny panel acknowledges that ultimately the NAT members should agree the frequency of meetings, meeting regularly would certainly help the NAT to benefit from the SARA and PRIME (Problem Resolution In a Multi-agency Environment) software packages.

Recommendation 18 That NAT's be encouraged to meet no later than on a bi-monthly basis.

Sharing Best Practice

The scrutiny panel was surprised to hear that there was no formal information sharing processes in place to discuss the NAT's. This would explain the fact that all the NAT's operate differently. Members' were of the opinion that a regular meeting between the NAT chair's and Safer Neighbourhood Officers would ensure that best practice could be discussed amongst themselves.

Recommendation 19 That all NAT chair's and Safer Neighbourhoods Officers meet once a quarter to discuss any issues relevant to NAT's.

Members' were unclear as to the role the Safer Neighbourhoods Strategy Board (SNSB) played in the management of the NAT's. Some members felt that there was a need for annual reporting to the SNSB and therefore it would be helpful if NAT's were asked to produce annual reports, which could then be used as a performance-monitoring tool.

Recommendation 20 That the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership considering canvassing NAT's views on the production of an annual report which evaluates the NAT's performance over the previous year, in order to assess its performance and identify any work which still needs to be done and to celebrate its success.

Recommendation 21 That once completed, the NAT Chair's be asked to forward the annual report to relevant contacts, including all partners and Town and Parish council's.

Performance Monitoring

Members' were unclear as to what performance management arrangements were in place in relation to the NAT's. It was clear that some of the performance outcomes included in the current Local Area Agreement (LAA) did tie in to the Neighbourhood agenda. However, the LAA and its outcomes were not discussed at NAT meetings, nor how the NAT could help the Local Strategic Partnership meet some of the outcomes in the LAA.

Recommendation 22 That the Safer Neighbourhoods Strategy Board give consideration to Neighbourhood Action Teams assisting the partnership in meeting its targets identified in the Local Area Agreement.

Councillor Call for Action

As was explained on page 25, the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) came into being on 1 April 2009. As part of the CCfA process, Neighbourhood Action Teams will be an important problem resolution tool for elected members when resolving community issues at a local level.

The NAT will allow community safety partnerships to work together to resolve crime and disorder problems, in a forum which is open to the public.

The NAT should therefore boost public confidence that the police, council and local partners are acting on crime and anti-social behaviour issues at a local level.

Recommendation 23 That as part of the CCfA process, the council ensures that NATs are an integral part of the policy for resolving problems at a local level.

Recommendation 24 That the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership ensures that all NAT members receive sufficient training on the CCfA prior to them being asked to consider a CCfA request.