

## **NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **CABINET**

#### **NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTION TEAMS IN NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE**

##### **1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT**

- 1.1 To consider the recommendations of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel in relation to Neighbourhood Action Teams in North Lincolnshire.

##### **2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 At its meeting held on 8 July 2009, council considered a report of the Safer and Stronger communities Scrutiny Panel in relation to Neighbourhood Action Teams in North Lincolnshire.
- 2.2 The report was approved by council and referred to cabinet for consideration of the recommendations with a view to the preparation of an action plan.
- 2.3 The panel completed its review in June 2009. It was carried out with a brief -
  - To determine if Neighbourhood Action Teams act as a catalyst for solving problems at a local level.
  - To ascertain the level of commitment allocated to the Neighbourhood Action Teams by Safer Neighbourhood Partners.
  - To determine if the issues Neighbourhood Action Teams are trying to tackle are sufficiently resourced.
  - To establish if a relationship exists between Town and Parish Councils and the relevant Neighbourhood Action Team.
  - To establish if Neighbourhood Action Teams utilise the appropriate methodology when problem solving at a local level.
  - To determine whether Neighbourhood Action Team members are raising the appropriate concerns of local residents.

2.4 Following the review, the panel made 24 recommendations. A copy of these together with the conclusions of the report are attached as an appendix to this report.

### **3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

3.1 There are no options associated with this report.

### **4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)**

4.1 There may be some resource implications associated with the recommendations when they are implemented.

### **5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME & DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)**

5.1 There may be other implications associated with the implementation of the recommendations which will be highlighted in any action plan.

### **6. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION**

6.1 The panel consulted widely with other scrutiny members and officers and other relevant organisations in relation to the preparation of the original report.

### **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 That the report and recommendations be approved and adopted.

7.2 That the Service Director Community Planning and Resources, the Service Director Legal and Democratic and the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood, Environmental and Communities prepare an action plan in response to the recommendations of the report for submission to cabinet.

## **SERVICE DIRECTOR LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC**

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**Background Papers used in the preparation of this report** - Report of the Safe and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel - Neighbourhood Action Teams in North Lincolnshire.

## **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.