

 **Southport Homewatch Association**

**Minutes of AGM 18th April 2024**

**1. Welcome and introductions**

Jacqueline Webb (Chair) opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and explained why Homewatch is using a new venue (Lord Street West Church Hall has been closed due to RAAC).

After the usual H&S/Welfare introduction Jacqueline outlined the agenda for the evening which was as follows -

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Election of Officers
3. Chairman’s address
4. Treasurer’s report
5. Presentation by Detective Sergeant Alan Williams and Detective Sergeant Helen Welling from Operation Castle Unit in Police HQ followed by questions from the floor
6. Sergeant Andy Dentith from Southport Policing Team to cover local crime statistics assisted by PCSO Trevor Burcombe. Andy will take questions from the floor following his talk.
7. Thankyou and close

**2. Election of Officers**

Jacqueline outlined the fact that there are only three active Committee members which gives cause for concern for the long term viability of the Association and urged Scheme Leaders and Deputies to consider joining the Committee. Jacqueline stated it was not a huge commitment as the Committee only meet monthly to discuss progress, agree future steps and ensure outstanding tasks are addressed. Jacqueline stated that if anyone was interested they could speak to a Committee member after the meeting.

Jacqueline stated that the following were willing to stand again as Committee members -

* Jacqueline Webb as Chair
* Dave Stanley as Treasurer
* Stuart Dunwoodie as Secretary

Proposers and Seconders for each of the three posts were taken from the floor and therefore the Committee remains as above. NB. Proposers and Seconders names can be viewed if a formal request is made to Jacqueline Webb or Stuart Dunwoodie.

**3. Chairman’s address**

Jacqueline commenced by thanking the Committee for their support over the past twelve months and thanked past Committee members Ted Ranson and James Sharkey for their significant contribution.

Jacqueline thanked the Police for their continued support without which the Association would not be able to survive.

Jacqueline stated we have currently 160 active Homewatch schemes in Southport and suggested to the floor they may be able to assist in suggesting to friends and family the benefits of starting up their own scheme thus increasing Homewatch coverage in Southport.

Jacqueline informed the floor that the Association had benefited from a successful bid to gain a share of some proceeds of crime funding. This is to be specifically allocated to Ainsdale as per the bidding rules set by the Police. The money will be spent on purchasing more robust metal street signs to replace damaged and faded ones in Ainsdale.

Jacqueline explained that the Association had further benefited from sponsorship from two local Security companies and thanked Dave Stanley for his efforts in securing the sponsorship.

Jacqueline stated that the selling of security items had fallen off and as a result the cheaper items were now on display in the hall and members could help themselves to the products on display. Jacqueline informed the floor that should anyone want further supplies for their schemes they could see a Committee member after the meeting and if stocks allowed the items requested would be supplied.

Jacqueline discussed the Association’s desire to proceed with Ward level meetings and suggested Ainsdale may be the ideal place to commence these meetings.

Jacqueline finished by thanking all present on the night and of course the scheme leaders for their support over the past year and especially those who volunteered to help with some of the Associations admin tasks.

**4. Treasurer’s report**

Dave opened his address by stating he was not intending to go through every transaction over the past year but stated that if anyone wanted a copy of the audited accounts he would be happy to forward them.

Dave stated that 2023 went smoothly aided by the introduction of on-line banking, debit cards and the SumUp card machine for taking sales of Homewatch merchandise.

Dave stressed Southport Homewatch is a non-profit making association which brings into focus the importance of receiving donations from members.

Dave stated he had successfully acquired sponsorship from two local security companies, namely SES Security Limited and EFT Systems Limited. This sponsorship totals £750 which helps enormously with plans going forward. Dave made the point that this sponsorship does not form part of the 2023 accounts as it has just happened.

The 2023 accounts looks as follows -

* Opening balance £2385
* Income from sales £31
* Cost as follows -
	+ Web/Email hosting £106
	+ Accommodation (church hall hire) £105
	+ Materials (street signs) £101
	+ Stationery £34
	+ Miscellaneous £51
* Total outgoings £397
* Closing balance as of December 2023 £2020

Dave thanked everyone for the time and closed his presentation.

**5. Presentation on burglary prevention**

Sergeant Williams gave an overview of Operation Castle stating it was set up in 2017 and as a result there have been 881 years of custodial sentences allocated to those arrested for burglary.

Sergeant Williams outlined the agenda for the presentation which covered the following headings -

1. Common ways of burglary
2. Prevention
3. How to report
4. If you are a victim
5. Handing out a security checklist for home
6. Q&A

1. Common ways of burglary

* Don’t leave doors and windows open
* Don’t leave garden tools out as thieves use them to break in
* Use window locks
* Use anti-snap lock fittings on patio doors - Patlock or similar. NB. These can be purchased from Southport Homewatch at a discounted price
* Don’t leave ladders outside
* Don’t leave keys near front doors
* When in the garden don’t leave back doors open if they are not in view
* Beware of distraction callers at the door

2. Prevention

* Use window locks
* Lock doors - don’t just close and raise the handle on patio style door handles but use the key to lock them
* Keep high value goods out of sight especially in cars
* Use a Ring doorbell or CCTV
* Send in your suspicious Ring or CCTV footage if something is captured that is not right to <https://unitedkingdom1cpp-portal.digital-policing.co.uk/merseyside/appeal/castle>
* Use outside security lights back and front
* Plant shrubs and/or have high fencing to deter thieves
* Don’t open your door to cold callers
* Get a dog

3. How to report

* Call 999 if its and emergency
* Call 101 for non emergencies
* Report on the Merseyside website for non emergencies

4. If you are a victim

* Don’t tidy up before the Police/CSI have been
* Always report crime
* Secure potential evidence
* Don’t touch items the burglars may have left behind
* Be patient for CSI teams to attend
* A Detective will call at every burglary - that is our commitment in Merseyside Police

5. Security checklist

* A self-check security prevention checklist was handed out to the floor. NB. Should any member want a copy of this checklist it can be supplied just email the request.

6. Q&A

Q. Do Police actually attend burglaries?

A. We do yes, that is our commitment in Merseyside Police. A Detective will review every burglary.

Q. Do you need a licence to own an air pistol?

A. No licence is needed but I would urge caution as an air pistol can cause severe injury.

Q. Can we legally use razor wire and/or vandal paint?

A. If you are using these forms of burglary prevention you MUST display a sign clearing showing that these items are in use on your property and the sign must state what items you are using with a photograph of the item. Razor wire cannot be used on any wall or fencing below 2.4 metres. If in doubt please refer the matter to the Police.

Q. What are the timescales for Police response?

A. If a burglary is actively happening it will be classed as a grade 1 response and the Police should be with you within ten minutes. If the situation is not live then the response time will differ depending on the current workload. Each situation is different and I cannot give an exact response time other that if the matter is classed as grade 1.

Q. If you ring the Police would you give an ETA?

A. It might not be possible to give a specific ETA as it depends on priorities at the time.

Q. Are the number of Police Officers adequate to cover Merseyside?

A. Police numbers have increased, we currently have some vacancies for PCSO’s and of course we could always do with greater numbers but we do the best we can with the Officers we have.

Q. If we have been burgled and the front door is not secure we feel very vulnerable so we need an ETA from the Police?

A. When you ring through the crime you must impress on the call handler that you are vulnerable and you should be placed higher up the ladder for attendance. It will of course depend on what the priorities are at the time.

Q. Are Police Officers based in Southport now?

A. I will leave Andy to answer that question.

A Scheme Leader made a comment - On a positive note I called the Police saying I saw a man acting suspiciously trying car doors and going into a neighbours garden. The Police attended very quickly and caught the individual in the act of attempted burglary.

Sergeant Williams concluded his presentation and Jacqueline thanked him for his time and made the following points -

1. Patlocks are available via the Homewatch website and can be purchased at a discounted price
2. The Homewatch website displayed the various ways the Police can be contacted
3. There is a digital version of the questionnaire Sgt Williams handed out on the Homewatch website

**6. Presentation by Sergeant Andy Dentith**

Sergeant Dentith supplied the following information -

* There are three teams based in Southport
* 999 calls are responded to by Police Officers from Southport
* The front desk at Southport Police Station is manned by is not 24 hour
* Southport are struggling to recruit PCSO’s but the recruitment process is on-going
* Southport has moved from three PC’s per team to four PC’s per team
* Operation Pelican is proving to be very successful with plain clothes Police Officers arresting many drug dealers
* Crime figures for last year are as follows -
	+ Burglary of businesses 105 which is an increase of 12 over the previous year
	+ Residential burglaries 150 which is a decrease of 98 over the previous year (please note this figure includes burglaries from sheds and garages)
	+ General crime - shoplifting remained the same as the previous year but it has to be noted that not all crimes are reported
	+ A pilot project was undertaken because of increased funds being available and the town centre was targeted with all CCTV cameras changed and/or up-graded
	+ Money was also invested by targeting children with a view to preventing future crime

Sergeant Dentith went on to explain about the exercise in allocating proceeds of crime money and that the Police had earmarked Ainsdale as the recipient. Sgt Dentith explained the process for bidding for a share of the money which totalled £25K. As readers will be aware Southport Homewatch bid for a share of the money and was successful in its endeavours.

Sergeant Dentith then took questions from the floor as follows -

Q. People gather on a regular basis near my property and are dealing drugs, what is happening to prevent this?

A. We do have Operation Pelican teams dealing with this problem. You won’t see any activity as the Officers are dressed in plain clothes but I assure you something is happening. Vehicles are being monitored in the area with ‘markers’ placed on them so if they enter a certain area they ping up on the system. We are aware it is an on-going problem but things are happening.

Q. Is Southport classed as a ‘hotspot’ area?

A. We have 25 ‘hotspot’ areas and 17 of them are in the town centre. This may sound a lot but for the size of Southport it’s not a huge amount.

Q. What can be done about the amount of cyclists cycling on the pavements, they are a hazard?

A. To be honest the Police do not have the resources to deal with this problem.

Q. Chapel Street is a problem with all the cyclists, again it’s a big hazard?

A. As I just said the Police don’t really have the resources to deal with this.

Q. There is a van parked on our road and it has been there for a long time, it’s a hazard to residents trying to manoeuvre around it and it’s parked near a junction. We have contacted the Council and they are not able to help, can the Police assist?

A. We can have a look and if it’s causing an obstruction we can do something about it. I will ask the Highways Dept if there is anything they can do to help. Please give me the details after the meeting.

Q. Re the above point - if the Council cannot help try contacting your local Councillor.

Q. Two ladies were recently killed just outside my front gate by speeding cars. The speed limit is 20 but that does not deter cars from driving far in excess of this speed limit. Who decides to install speed cameras’?

A. County will decide. It is the Police’s responsibility and speed limits should be enforced but it depends on priorities. I think an assessment has been carried out.

Q. There is an obstruction near a corner where a van constantly parks, what can be done?

A. Each case is judged on its own merits, we can come out and assess the situation and if it’s an obstruction the van will be ticketed.

That concluded the Q&A session and Jacqueline thanked Sergeant Dentith for his time.

**7. Thank you and close**

Jacqueline drew proceedings to a close and thanked all the speakers and those Scheme Leaders and Deputies who attended the event.