

What is Community Speed Watch

The growth in traffic on the roads has outpaced the budgets available to the police for enforcement and to the highways authorities for physical traffic-calming measures. Consequently, traffic enforcement and management resources have been focused on locations with the worst accident statistics. This excludes the vast majority of rural locations affected by speeding. Yet, real and perceived speeding have been revealed by crime surveys and police consultation to be a major concern in rural areas. Communities can be severed by fast roads and frustrated by the lack of official action. Individuals can feel intimidated by speeding vehicles.

Community Speed Watch originated as a police response to this problem. It is intended for rural locations affected by speeding which do not fit the profile for regular traffic enforcement or traffic-calming measures. The scheme shares responsibility for reducing speeding between the police, communities and other agencies.

Community Speed Watch involves active members of the community joining together to monitor speed at selected locations in their village using an approved "speed gun". Groups of at least two volunteers record the registration numbers of vehicles traveling in excess of 36mph in 30mph zones and 47mph in 40mph zones. The registration number, speed, place, date, time, vehicle type and the volunteers' names are reported to the police, who write to the owner pointing out that his/her vehicle was detected traveling well in excess of the speed limit and asking them to desist. If the same vehicle is detected speeding on a second occasion, a second letter is sent. If the same vehicle is detected speeding a third time, a final letter is sent with a warning that the vehicle may be targeted by the police and, if detected speeding, the driver will be prosecuted. The letters are intended to persuade drivers to slow down. In the Sussex pilot scheme at Ringmer, few second letters and no third letters have had to be sent.

Monitoring locations are proposed by volunteers and approved by the police after a formal risk assessment. Only locations well within 30mph or 40mph zones on non-trunk roads are eligible. The police provide training to volunteers on operating the speed gun, safety and managing hostile drivers. They also provide personal accident and public liability insurance. While on duty, volunteers must wear high-visibility clothing, stay out of the road and not obstruct the footway. Volunteers are also advised to carry a mobile phone.

The minimum number of volunteers in a Community Speed Watch group is six and groups must commit to a minimum number of hours per week. There must be a coordinator and deputy who take responsibility for equipment. The community must fund the purchase of the speed gun (about £2,360) and other equipment (perhaps another £50), and the annual recalibration of the gun (about £120), but the gun becomes the property of the police. The community must also insure the gun (the cheapest option would be to get the Parish Council to include the gun in its insurance policy). Consideration should be given to signs stating "Police Speed Checks" at the approaches to a village.

Communities interested in joining Community Speed Watch need to secure letters of support from their Neighbourhood Policing Team and Parish Council. Before doing so, they should establish the extent of local support for such an initiative, including the likelihood of recruiting enough volunteers. They also need to research their traffic problem. This means describing the nature, extent and location of the problem, and

the typical victims and offenders. The causes of problem should be identified. A case needs to be made as to why Community Speed Watch is the best response to the problem(s) as opposed methods such as Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs), although the various options are not mutually exclusive. It is very helpful if a one-week speed survey is conducted by the local highways authority to provide data on the speed and volume of traffic. This will have to be funded by the community (it currently costs about £250-300), but will also provide a datum against which the success of Community Speed Watch can subsequently be measured.

If the community can secure the support of their Neighbourhood Policing Team and Parish Council, funding for the purchase of equipment and its maintenance¹, and sufficient popular support, a Community Speed Watch group should be formally established or an existing organization persuaded to manage the scheme (eg Neighbourhood Watch or Parish Council). A co-ordinator and deputy should be appointed, and an operations manual compiled (setting out instructions on how to operate the speed gun, conduct monitoring sessions safely, manage hostile drivers and so on).

It is also necessary to ensure that the police have set up internal arrangements to receive reports, trace vehicle owners, send out letters and target repeat offenders. The existence and role of the Community Speed Watch group needs to be formally acknowledged by the police.

When launching the scheme, it is advisable to highlight the traffic problem to drivers beforehand in a campaign involving the local media, employers, schools and other agencies using press releases and posters at prominent locations. The nature of Community Speed Watch also needs to be explained. Greater public awareness of the problem of speeding will “justify” the scheme to most drivers, allay their suspicions and minimize the risk of causing aggravation by surprising them.

Arrangements need to be made to assess the success of the scheme at regular points in the future. This may involve subsequent speed surveys.

¹ The total cost of Community Speed Watch could therefore be in the region of **£3,200** upfront and **£135** a year thereafter. Upfront costs include: speed gun (£2,360), at least 3 high-visibility vests (£30), at least 3 “Speed Watch” patches for the vests (£15), an initial speed survey (£250), launch campaign posters (£350) and “Police Speed Check” signs (2 for £200). Running costs include: speed gun recalibration (£120), paper and printer cartridges (£10), the cost of replacing vests (assume depreciation of £5 a year) and possibly the cost of insuring the speed gun.