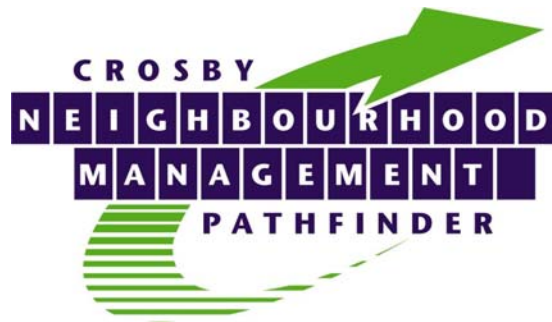


**Case study: Crosby Pathfinder's initiative to create safer neighbourhoods using AlertBox technology**



**Reducing crime and the fear of crime in Crosby**



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*“At no other time has concern for security in our communities been greater. Hardly a day passes without the government being called upon to respond to ever increasing levels of public anxiety.”*

*Tony Jackson CBE, Chairman of AlertBox Ltd*

## **Introduction**

In a project combining wireless communication technology with simple public initiative, positive steps are being taken in Crosby, North Lincolnshire, to build safer communities.

This document looks at how Crosby Pathfinder has used AlertBox to help build successful, sustainable partnerships between the police, local authorities and communities, and how the initiative is helping to tackle crime effectively.

## **Background**

Crosby in North Lincolnshire suffers from high crime rates, low employment and run-down neighbourhoods and part of the area has been designated a Police Priority Area (PPA).

Recognising the urgent need to improve the situation, North Lincolnshire Council established the **Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder** programme in 2004, designed to identify and address residents' key concerns, and set up partnerships between the community and local agencies to:

- increase community safety
- manage the local environment more effectively
- improve housing stock
- work with young people
- encourage employment opportunities

This neighbourhood management process is being adopted in many parts of the country, and is increasingly seen as one of the best ways to deliver effective neighbourhood renewal. The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, which is responsible for overseeing the government's comprehensive neighbourhood renewals strategy, supports the growth of Pathfinder projects.

The initiative feeds into high-level strategies set out by the government which aim to:

- engage the community
- provide a visible policing presence
- improve communication between police and public
- provide better information about community safety
- increase voluntary involvement in policing



### ***Social challenges in Crosby***

Crosby contains a number of wards where high crime rates, low employment and run-down housing are prevalent. Crosby and Park ward, Town ward and Frodingham ward are three of the most deprived in North Lincolnshire. The 2004 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, rank Crosby Park Estate as the second worst Super Output Area (SOA) in England for crime. The Crosby area has six SOAs in the worst 100. Residential and social factors include:

- 8,000 households and 11,000 residents
- decline in owner-occupied housing
- low housing demand due to high crime rates and properties deemed 'unfit'
- 12 per cent of houses in Crosby are deemed 'unfit' compared to a four per cent average in England as a whole
- lowest incomes levels of any ward in the authority

### ***Reducing crime in Crosby***

A number of measures have been taken in the Crosby area to help reduce crime rates and fear of crime. These include:

- creation of resident associations and neighbourhood watch groups
- closing 'snickets', which have become threatening 'no-go' areas for law-abiding residents, as they are used as escape routes by suspects under police pursuit and by individuals behaving antisocially
- recruitment of five Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) to operate within the Scunthorpe North Local Policing Team (LPT), which includes Crosby
- creation of five AlertBox networks

### **The Crosby Pathfinder-AlertBox Pilot**

In October 2005, Crosby Pathfinder and the local community established a pilot AlertBox 'electronic neighbourhood watch' network with the aim of addressing crime and the fear of crime.

The Crosby AlertBox pilot was set up following success in other areas of the UK. In common with all Pathfinder projects, local residents play a part in deciding what strategies they adopt to improve their community. Five areas were chosen to run electronic neighbourhood watch pilots. One of them was part of a six-month police operation to deal with high volumes of antisocial behaviour in Jackson Road and Edward Road. In total, 100 AlertBoxes were distributed, with 20 units in each of the chosen areas. A volunteer was appointed in each locality to distribute and coordinate the AlertBoxes.



### **Shared Aims**

The objectives of the Crosby AlertBox project align closely with the government's overall aims for community safety and renewal:

- reassure the public and reduce fear of crime
- increase voluntary sector engagement
- improve communication between the community and local authorities leading to more arrests and convictions, and reduced crime rates

AlertBox's high-level aims also align with government objectives, making it a natural partner for the Crosby Pathfinder project. AlertBox networks are set up to:

- reduce crime and the fear of crime
- promote community awareness
- raise vigilance levels
- improve witness power
- reassure and empower local communities
- promote sustainable partnerships
- engage members of the community with PCSOs and community wardens
- aid regeneration and improve the local economy



### **What is AlertBox?**

AlertBox is an electronic form of neighbourhood watch. An AlertBox community combines technology, and (in the case of Crosby Pathfinder) the time of volunteers to help foster a new mind-set where people help each other build a safer community.

People in the network realise the benefit of uniting together with other members of the community and cooperating with public authorities, all of whom have a common objective: to create a safer and more pleasant environment in which to live.

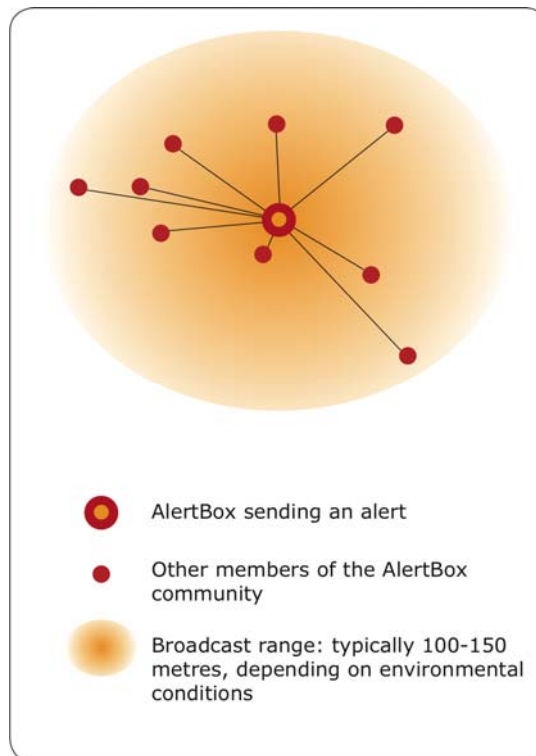
Networks use digital wireless transceivers (see figure 1) to connect people in different homes. It broadcasts warning or emergency messages (see figure 2) to neighbouring AlertBox units at the press of a button.



*Figure 1: An AlertBox Unit*

The units are robust, simple to use and require no configuration by the user. Installation consists only of plugging the unit into the mains.

Each AlertBox is programmed with the user's name, address and telephone number and keeps a log of all events: if a warning is sent, an exact and reliable record of the event – including the date and time - is kept.



*Figure 2: An AlertBox Network*

- A broadcast **warning** message raises vigilance and awareness **before** a possible incident takes place. Typical examples of warning messages include bogus callers, suspicious people or antisocial behaviour.
- A broadcast **emergency** message brings assistance from neighbours within seconds and generates extra witness potential for the emergency services. Typical examples of emergency messages include attempted break-ins, fire or medical problems.

### ***Increasing community engagement***

With the introduction of an AlertBox network, members of the community gain a new way to communicate with each other. Better communication leads to stronger relationships and a more defined sense of community.

Residents in the network are issued with window stickers which provide a catalyst for ad-hoc meetings between Community Wardens or PCSOs and members of the electronic neighbourhood watch community, as well as deterring would-be troublemakers and reassuring the community that help is only seconds away.



*Figure 3: Window Sticker*



*Figure 4: Roadside Notice*

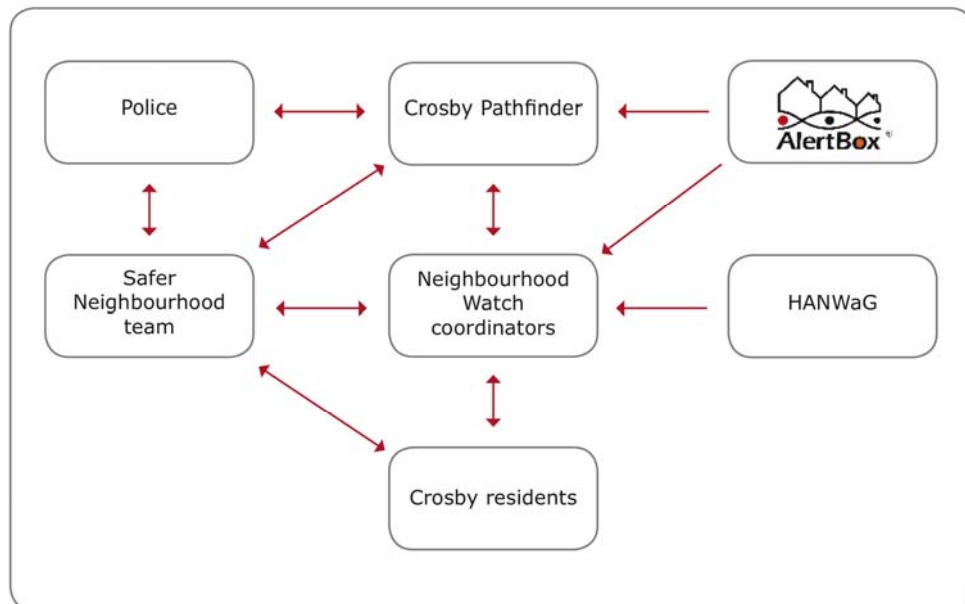


There are additional network effects which also help to improve engagement:

- promotes an ethos of self-help amongst individuals within the community
- provides an early warning system, preventing crime by alerting people **before** an incident takes place
- promotes engagement and cooperation with the authorities
- educates people on best practice towards personal safety
- generates witness potential

### ***Helping people to help themselves***

Electronic neighbourhood watch communities empower people to respond to crime positively. By joining a community, they become an active part of the solution.



*Figure 5: The Crosby Community: Building Safer Neighbourhoods*

The simple act of becoming a member of the community makes an individual feel more secure – even if they never have to use their AlertBox. Figure 5 demonstrates the network effect AlertBox promotes (HANWaG is the Humberside Association of Neighbourhood Watch Groups, who advised the Crosby coordinators on best practice).

### ***Expansion potential***

Once a network is established, it can easily be expanded. Crosby Pathfinder members can administer their own projects, giving them the flexibility to respond to their own requirements. They can optimize the effectiveness of the network by redeploying units as necessary.

To join, a new member has simply to plug their pre-configured AlertBox into the power supply. As soon as it is plugged in, all the other units on the network recognise the new member and automatically include it in the network.

### ***Sustainability***

It is easy to reprogram AlertBoxes to reflect changes of address. There are no ongoing running costs (apart from electricity), and information gathered from the network can be used to help inform local strategies. There is a displacement effect, with criminals avoiding those areas where a project is running.

### **Results**

Crosby Pathfinder trialled electronic neighbourhood watch networks for one year as part of its programme of neighbourhood improvement. During that time the networks helped support voluntary and community activities to reduce crime and the impact of antisocial behaviour. They are seen as the catalyst that have helped Crosby achieve important results:

- fear of crime has reduced, and the neighbourhoods where the networks have been set up are seen to be safer
- people are more engaged with self-help community activities such as neighbourhood watch schemes and other crime reduction activities
- more community-generated intelligence is being fed back to authorities involved with the reduction of crime and antisocial behaviour

Following the trials, AlertBox networks are now being focussed on three key areas, where they are also being extended. Residents on the 'waiting list' in the original projects are now being added to the network. A new area with a high level of antisocial behaviour is currently being assessed by the police and Pathfinder for an AlertBox network.

### ***Community benefits***

The electronic neighbourhood watch networks have successfully united communities. Window stickers advertising the presence of security devices in homes have raised awareness of the network and acted as a deterrent to criminals and nuisance elements.



The well-publicised fact that help is only seconds away reduces both crime and the fear of crime. Given the ability to send warning or emergency messages, people feel secure where they may previously have felt isolated and vulnerable.

Because the scheme is highly visible, it reassures the law-abiding public that its community is being made safer.

### ***Promotes community awareness***

Installing electronic neighbourhood watch networks in communities around Crosby has increased co-operation between residents and law-enforcement agencies as citizens have experienced the benefits of involvement. A more effective response to crime and a greater feeling of safety has increased their willingness to communicate positively with the police.

The scheme promotes a sense of belonging and discourages division, or a 'them and us' situation; members of the public are more likely to support the work of the police and PCSOs.

### ***Improves witness power***

Members of an electronic neighbourhood watch community provide high quality information to the police. The Crosby pilots have proved that emergency messages produce a very good response from neighbours, in the form of assistance and witness potential.

### ***Improves visibility and perception***

An AlertBox community has high visibility, improving the perception of the area as a safe place to live.

The recognition effect is twofold: law-abiding people feel safe, and criminals know that the area is not a soft target.

### ***Engages the community; promotes cohesion***

Providing people with a self-help tool empowers them to become part of the crime prevention process. This positive approach replaces a more passive attitude to crime, over-reliant on the police and local authority 'spoon-feeding' measures.

A stronger sense of community leads to better interaction with the police, PCSOs and other crime reduction bodies. Improved communication with the police brings many potential benefits, ranging from improved information and community relations to better recruitment possibilities.



Because an electronic neighbourhood watch community does not rely on any single initiative, project or person for its survival, there is more chance of a sustained community improvement. The involvement of several bodies, down to community level, brings a strong momentum and continuity to the project.

In the short term, the technology is simple to deploy and offers a speedy response to immediate pressures. It is a good answer to the common question, "What is being done?"

In the longer term it helps to generate a new mindset, where people realise they can (and should) help prevent crime by being vigilant, supportive and proactive in their communities.

### ***What the people involved think***

*"AlertBox has worked well. It is very popular and an excellent tool, especially for elderly residents who are reassured by the fact they can reach their neighbours at the push of a button. We have certainly seen results."*

**Jodie Booth, Operations Manager, Crosby Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder**

*"AlertBox is proving a useful tool in combating anti-social behaviour. It brings a sense of security to a community, increases the number of potential witnesses to an incident, and improves the quality of evidence provided."*

**Bruno Watson, Community Safety Liaison Manager, Safer Neighbourhoods North Lincolnshire**

*"AlertBox makes people feel safe. When the button is hit, it's frontline, people are there quickly. It gets results."*

**Pat Day, resident, neighbourhood watch coordinator, Crosby Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder director, AlertBox coordinator**

*"It gets the community working together; taking ownership where you live is great and encourages pride in your area."*

**Mike Gains, Police Community Support Officer**



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