



Should ABX networks be publicly funded?

People who are involved in the safety and regeneration of communities will be familiar with the problems of disadvantaged areas, and the demoralising effect that crime, drugs, violence and antisocial behaviour have on those who live and work there. Because AlertBox is a very simple and cost-effective tool in tackling such problems, a case can be made for public funding of AlertBox networks.

A first step towards rebuilding the morale and unity of communities affected in this way is to empower them to help themselves, as Neighbourhood Watch has shown over a number of years.

In essence, AlertBox builds on the Neighbourhood Watch concept by adding an electronic dimension. A network of simple-to-operate wireless devices placed in homes or business premises gives residents and traders the ability to communicate instantly with their neighbours whenever they feel uncertain, threatened or in danger.

Feelings of isolation and helplessness diminish as a result. That in turn leads to improved morale and reduced fear of crime, and to improved protection for the vulnerable.

In deprived areas, the language barrier between people of differing ethnicity tends to fragment communities. Here too, AlertBox has a contribution to make to social adhesion: under development is the facility for alert messages to be transmitted in one language and received automatically in another language.

In addition to helping members of a community to help themselves, an AlertBox network provides support for law-enforcement agencies. The presence of a network creates a "witness-power" effect which improves the flow of information to wardens and the police; resources may be deployed more efficiently, and built-in data logging helps in investigations.

An AlertBox network is easy and economical to deploy and administer. Networks are accountable, sustainable and scalable, and can be quickly redeployed. Once installed, there are no on-going costs.

This is a radical, practical and cost-effective approach to some of the more intractable problems of our time; public funding can make it a reality.