

Catch me if you can! Citizen Speed Watchers helping the police in South Somerset

Received via Governance International

Published On: 30 November 2015

Organisation: South Somerset District Council

Country: United Kingdom

Level of government: Local government

Sector: Public order and safety

Type: Partnerships, Public Service

Launched in: 2009

Overall development time: 1 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

Like this innovation

0 persons like this innovation

Description

Community Speed Watch gives local people the ability to get involved actively in road safety issues. The initiative started in the village of Ash in 2002, when a group of residents identified that there was a speeding problem.

The police encouraged communities to help them deal with local speeding problems by reporting incidents proactively. However, this did not deliver any real change. Nothing much was achieved until South Somerset District Council became involved in 2004.

Why the innovation was developed

- With limited resources available, driving offences in rural areas generally receive less police attention than on main trunk roads and motorways, despite the fact that a high proportion of accidents are on country roads.
-

Objectives

Enhance public trust, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Increase citizen engagement

- The initiative aims at improving road safety through an inclusive, community-based and community-led approach.
 - At the same time, the South Somerset Community Speed Watch initiative has the objective of improving partnership working with the police, fire and rescue services and various levels of local government (including Somerset County Council, South Somerset District Council and all relevant Town and Parish Councils within South Somerset).
 - The community speedwatch scheme was linked to two strategic objectives – building “resilient communities” (the volunteering element) and “safer communities” (tackling dangerous driving).
 - The initiative was awarded GBP 90 000 by the local council and in October 2009 the council, police and local volunteers started to set up a comprehensive community speedwatch scheme.
-

Main beneficiaries

Civil Society, General population, Government bodies, Government staff

- Pedestrians
- Drivers
- Police

Results

Effectiveness

- The community speedwatch scheme has exceeded the original targets set for year one and is continuing to grow.
 - It was anticipated that with the launch of the scheme, the number of speeding issues reported through the area boards community issues system would initially increase and then decrease as the scheme took effect.
-

Service quality

Responsiveness:

- From interviews with volunteers it is clear that there is enthusiasm for community speedwatch. This enthusiasm needs to be supported and maintained through improvements to the scheme.
 - Volunteers have suggested the following improvements to the scheme, which are now being addressed by the project steering group: better signage in speed limit areas more speed guns, a tape recorder to allow volunteers to record number plates, greater flexibility in the choice of community speedwatch sites in each area, the development of a community speedwatch website.
 - It is also important that data is collected and analysed at the beginning and end of each year at each community speedwatch site. This demonstrates the impact of the interventions at each site – something which is particularly important for volunteers.
 - The scheme has also had a positive impact upon local residents, as demonstrated by the following quote: "The yellow jackets are all over the place! It has to be having an effect on people like me. Now I allow a bit longer for my trip, which is good because I'm more relaxed and feel safer. It's good to see people taking control of issues like this." -A Salisbury resident.
-

Other improvements

- By January 2011, 567 community speed watch sessions had been undertaken by volunteers in Wiltshire. This equates to 3,750 hours of volunteer time, including classroom and roadside training and collating returns to the community speedwatch coordinator.
- During the year, 3,970 speeding vehicles were reported by speedwatch volunteers and the police sent warning letters were sent to the registered owners of those vehicles. 109 vehicles were reported a second time and the police followed up with targeted action against persistent offenders. Figures in January 2011 demonstrated a 53% reduction in speeding across community speedwatch sites.

Development

Design

Wiltshire community speedwatch was developed in October 2009. It is a three year programme designed to provide a county-wide co-ordinated response to the issue of speeding traffic. Speeding is a subject of growing public concern - it is regularly raised at area board meetings right across the county. The high level of demand was picked up at the council's area board meetings. As a result, the area boards team developed a bid for funding to support the development of a more comprehensive county-wide community speedwatch scheme.

Implementation

Tools used:

- Community speedwatch uses Wiltshire's unique community issues system - an online system that allows local people and community groups to raise local issues directly with their area board.
- When a speeding issue is submitted, the community area manager checks if the site is already the subject of police enforcement or has previously been surveyed using a "metrocount" - "metrocount" is an electronic system used for traffic data collection and analysis.
- If not, the community area manager sends "metrocount" request forms and criteria to the parish council to return to the road safety unit for action. When the "metrocount" survey has been carried out the road safety unit produce a report which states whether the level of speeding justifies further action. The community area manager then sends the report to the parish council.
- When an area is identified as suitable and safe for community speedwatch the parish council is asked to recruit community volunteers. The community speedwatch co-ordinator trains the volunteers to carry out roadside checks on the speed of vehicles.
- The volunteers are also supported by neighbourhood police teams. Community volunteers record the speed and registration numbers of offending vehicles and the owners of speeding vehicles are sent letters by the police which draw attention to the offence and warn the driver of the consequences of excessive speeding.

Resources used:

- The initial set up costs for the scheme were GBP 70 000. The scheme's creation has enabled Wiltshire to disband its Camera Safety Partnership and transfer the functions into the existing services and the community speedwatch scheme – helping to save over GBP 100 000 per year.
 - There is also a considerable benefit for the council in having in place a scheme that manages the hundreds of speeding inquiries the council receives each year. A study to work out the precise savings made by the project is being undertaken.
-

Diffusion

- The Community Speedwatch initiative has been so successful that it has gained national media acclaim.
 - Indeed, many other areas are now attempting to replicate the scheme.
-

Challenges and solutions

- Throughout the first year of the project a number of challenges have been identified. The project has highlighted differences between local resident's understanding of speed limits and police enforcement thresholds: local residents typically want enforcement at any speed over 30mph, whereas the threshold for police enforcement action begins at 36mph.
- This has required education and the development of options for those areas where speeding thresholds do not meet the criteria, for example speed awareness signage. Community speedwatch volunteers have themselves identified a need for further educational work around speeding. In the future the project could be extended to raise awareness of speeding by training young people in community speedwatch before they start driving and bringing community speedwatch groups into local schools.
- Another challenge is how to help parishes where the "metrocount" data does not support the introduction of Community speedwatch. A number of these parishes reported a high perception of speeding and some had already recruited volunteers for speedwatch before their eligibility for the scheme was established. It has been hard to maintain the goodwill and momentum of these volunteers. One way of maintaining momentum may be to allow volunteers to work at different sites.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Wiltshire's community speedwatch scheme has made a positive start and has resulted in enthusiastic and well targeted volunteer activity which has had a positive impact on speeding in Wiltshire.
 - Volunteers have been consulted and asked to suggest improvements to the scheme and the steering group has started to act on their suggestions. As the steering group continues to act on volunteer's suggestions the scheme will grow and build on the real success achieved so far.
-

Other information

The disbandment of the camera safety unit meant that the project methodology had to be redesigned. Demand for metrocount strips is now being dealt with by the council. In some cases this has led to longer processing times. Demand for the resources needed to support the scheme, such as metrocount strips, speed indicator devices (SIDs), speed guns and speed limit stickers for residents to attach to wheelie bins has increased significantly. This has particularly been the case with SIDs, which are seen by local residents across as a very effective speeding deterrent. However, they are usually only deployed at sites of community concern which meet certain speeding thresholds and then only on a rota basis. More needs to be done to promote the scheme and celebrate its achievements, particularly the valuable contribution of the volunteers to community safety. An event was held in April 2011 to acknowledge the contribution of volunteers and give them an opportunity to identify potential improvements to the scheme.

Copyright OECD. All rights reserved.