

HOME SAFE HOME

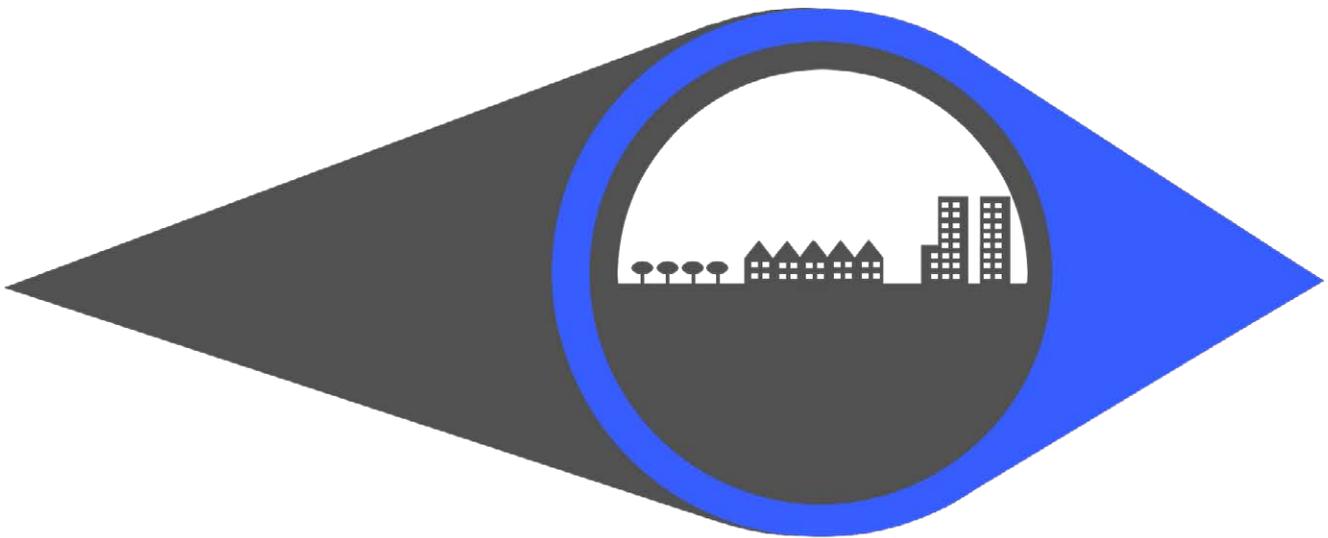
SAFER NEIGHBOURHOODS
THROUGH SAFE HOUSES
AND CITIZEN PATROLS



ANDREW BOFF
GLA CONSERVATIVES
GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
CitySafe – trusted refuges throughout London	2
Establishing Safe Houses for the vulnerable	3
Citizen Patrols – a proactive Neighbourhood Watch	6
Conclusion	8
Recommendations	8
Feedback	9



“The greatest asset of any community is its people. A barometer of that value is the willingness of the people to become volunteers”¹

INTRODUCTION

This report looks into promoting stronger relationships between communities and the police in their local areas. The goal of this report is to build a safer neighbourhood, through involving the local community and encouraging volunteering.

There are multiple approaches to encouraging this relationship. However the focus of this report will be on providing a costed, high safety means of developing new bonds between communities and the police. One aspect would be to examine the validity of establishing Safe Houses for children and vulnerable adults who feel threatened or unsafe. They could simply go to a house with a certified logo that tells them someone is inside and can provide them with help.

The other aim of the report is to look at the creation of Citizen Patrols. These patrols would serve as the eyes and ears of the local community. Their presence on the streets would act as a deterrent to anti-social behaviour and engender a sense of community in their area. The patrols would regularly liaise with the Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) with a view to reporting any issues that they feel warrants the attention of the police. Their local intelligence can assist in the overall effectiveness of the SNT.

“There are three things that every child needs, To feel loved, to feel valued and to feel safe.”
 - Barry Mizen²

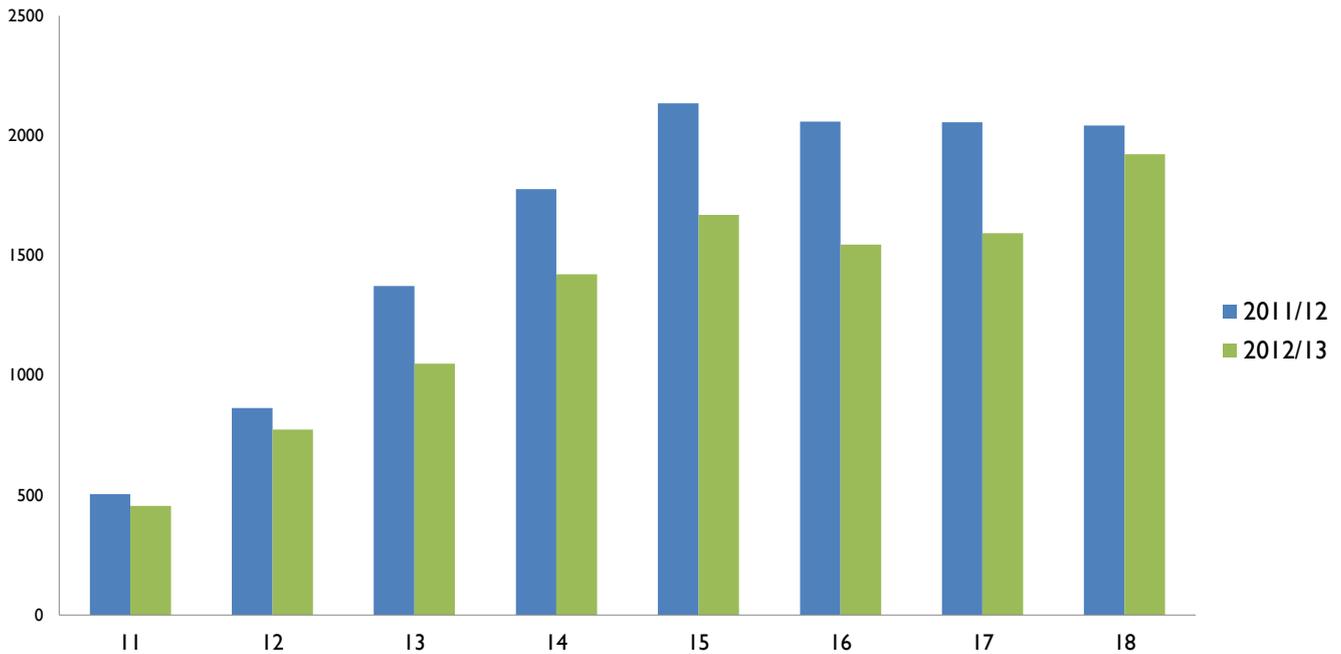
In 2008 Jimmy Mizen was murdered in a bakery in South East London. Since then his family have worked tirelessly in raising awareness of the dangers facing the young by visiting schools, creating safe havens for teenagers and encouraging people to unite around their communities. We do need people like the Mizen Foundation and the Ben Kinsella Trust are essential to help raise awareness about the dangers that exist. The crime figures below ³ clearly demonstrate the dangers facing young people in London.

1. City of Houston Citizen Patrol recruitment documentation, <http://www.houstontx.gov/police/vip/images/CPbrochure2012.pdf>

2. Barry Mizen. Guardian. 11 May 13. <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/may/11/murdered-son-legacy-hope-jimmy-mizen>

3. Freedom of Information Request Reference No: 2013040002859

Youth Violence, by age group, 2011-2013⁴



Although there is a downward trend there is still a need for new and inventive ways of protecting the vulnerable by improving community cohesion and helping the local police tackle crimes.

CITYSAFE – TRUSTED REFUGES THROUGHOUT LONDON

One attempt at protecting young people is the CitySafe campaign. This was established by the community organising group London Citizens along with the support of the Mizen family. The concept is simple to encourage local businesses to open their doors and help people in distress. It is a concept supported by the Mayor and Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime. (MOPAC.)

“CitySafe is ‘the best civil society crime prevention strategy in London’

– Kit Malthouse (former Deputy Mayor of Policing)

In fact City Hall, home of the Greater London Authority, became a CitySafe Haven in 2010 and there are now more than 300 CitySafe Havens across London.⁵ The CitySafe teams work with local communities in developing relationships with local businesses. They work closely with the police to help ensure that any local crime is reported. Lewisham Council has been especially receptive of the CitySafe concept, the Mayor of Lewisham, Sir Steve Bullock has agreed that all council buildings will be made Safe Havens. Additionally, in 2012 South Eastern Trains announced that Lewisham, Woolwich and Hither Green stations would be among the UK's first CitySafe railway stations. South Eastern has also signed a CitySafe Charter, pledging to provide temporary shelter to anyone in immediate danger and report 100% of crime incidents to the Police.

CitySafe is a very useful exercise in encouraging people to take control of their own areas and protect young vulnerable people. It is a useful tool in reducing crime which can only be a bonus for an overstretched police force. In 2011, Merseyside Police credited the CitySafe scheme with helping to reduce violent crime by 29% in the area. Local youth groups worked with CitySafe in four wards known for their gang violence in order to

4. The Met police definition of Youth Violence is any offence of Most Serious Violence and Assault with Injury or Weapon Enabled Crime, where the victim is aged 1 to 19

5. <http://www.citizensuk.org/campaigns/citysafe-campaign/>

identify areas that could be set aside as havens. The results are detailed below:

- Knife crime has come down by nearly one quarter and criminal damage by 47 per cent.
- The number of hate crimes have halved and harassment levels have fallen by 64 per cent.
- Robberies from local businesses have fallen by over 35 per cent, common assault has declined by nearly one third and drug crime has dropped by 10 per cent.⁶

It was the view of Merseyside Police that “the CitySafe Havens initiative has had a ‘halo’ effect, significantly reducing crime within 50m of all our 35 safe places.”⁷

ESTABLISHING SAFE HOUSES FOR THE VULNERABLE

The benefits of the CitySafe programme are quite promising, as it offers protection and engages the local community. Ideally a relationship could develop between local businesses and the neighbourhoods they serve. This is beneficial for community cohesion, and it is time to take the next step by asking local people to become more involved in protecting their communities.

This is where the concept of Safe Houses comes from. It is an idea that was developed in Canada under the title of the “Block Parent Program” and began in 1968 with the simple mission “to provide immediate assistance through a safety network and offer supportive community education programs.”⁸ Their yellow logo is a familiar and trusted brand throughout Canada. The program is there to protect the vulnerable and act as a “safety net” for children and the elderly. Currently the Block Parent Program has approximately 25,000 -30,000 Safe Houses across Canada. There are about 200 users a year – however one of its primary objectives is to act as a deterrent. The distinctive signs on the homes should push crime and antisocial behaviour out of the immediate area.

How does it work?

- While at home a placard is displayed identifying you as a block parent.
- A child comes to your door if in trouble.
- You let them in or in a minority of cases you can talk through the door (Depending on the situation, you do not have to let them in).
- You then call the authorities and/or child's parents.

Screening and training

- Volunteers appear at a local police station to sign up and have the maximum level checks (similar to an enhanced DBS check in UK).⁹
- Authorities also inspect the child abuse registry.
- If successful, they are then visited at home by the programme and interviewed.
- They then get a sign and/or a placard – these have serial numbers/watermarks so they can't be replicated.
- Local coordinators input vital details such as your name, address, serial number into an online database.

6. <http://www.crp-news.com/htm/n20111107.817819.htm>

7. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-15633528>. 8 Nov 2011

8. <http://www.blockparent.ca/about.htm#mission>

9. Required when an adult is working with children and young people. The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) replaces the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). Volunteers should be free <https://www.gov.uk/dbs-check-requests-guidance-for-employers#volunteer-applications>

The only volunteer job you can do from your couch.



Fig. 2: Example of an advert used by the Canadian Block Parent Program

Funding and costs

- \$23K Canadian Dollars per year comes from federal government
- \$70K Canadian Dollars per year is through sponsorship from an insurance company
- There is no membership or registration fee – the programme comes at no cost to volunteers.

According to the Block Parent Program in Canada it costs approximately \$1,500 Canadian Dollars to recruit 10 Block Parents and establish a Block Parent Program in a community or neighbourhood with 25,000 residents and three elementary schools. This includes the preliminary delivery of safety educational materials to elementary school children and seniors.¹⁰

There are no incentives given to sign up to the programme – the only incentive is that you are giving back to the community without leaving your home. Certainly it would be a good safety net for suburban London communities where there may not be many buildings or shops for the CitySafe programme to operate from. It would also be useful for the more transient inner city London communities as they generally do not know their neighbours and having a network of Safe Houses would bring considerable peace of mind. It must be emphasised that the homeowner is of course free to decide when they wish to display their sign; there are no set number of required hours. It is also important to note that a Block Parent is not required to let a child into their home; they can simply pick up the phone and call the police if that is required from the incident.

¹⁰. http://www.blockparent.ca/program_costs.htm

“Safe Houses have been a main stay in Canadian Communities for over 45 years. They are a safety net for our children and elders. It gives local residents the chance to give something back to their community – without even having to leave their house. Safe Houses are needed even more nowadays in transient cities such as Winnipeg and London, where neighbours don’t know each other like they once did. This programme works best in small communities. My advice is to start in small pockets of London, and gradually grow it, ultimately having individual projects running side by side in different neighbourhoods.”

· Linda Patterson, the National President of the Block Parent Programme, Canada

It is also a concept that has been established in Australia under the “Safety House” Program as well as areas of the United States.

A child was running down the street with a speeding car pursuing him in reverse. The BP [Block Parent] offered him shelter. The car occupants got out of the car and uttered threats against them, but did not come onto the property. They were intoxicated and continued to utter threats. Once they were told the Police were called they swiftly left. The boy got home safely and the parents came back to thank the BPs. They were recent immigrants and were actually planning to move from the neighbourhood. The boy said he was returning from the local convenience store when the car began to chase him and he had no idea why he was being pursued - he was very distraught. In any case, he turned to the BP home because he saw them in the yard and the BP sign.

May 2013 - John M. King School area, Winnipeg¹¹

Another success for the Program involved a child who said they were being abused in their home. The child had been taught at school that if they were ever in danger that a Block Parent® Home was a safe place to go. One night the child did go to the BP home and were given refuge, the Block Parent® called the authorities who in turn visited the BP home and talked to the Child. (Linda Patterson)

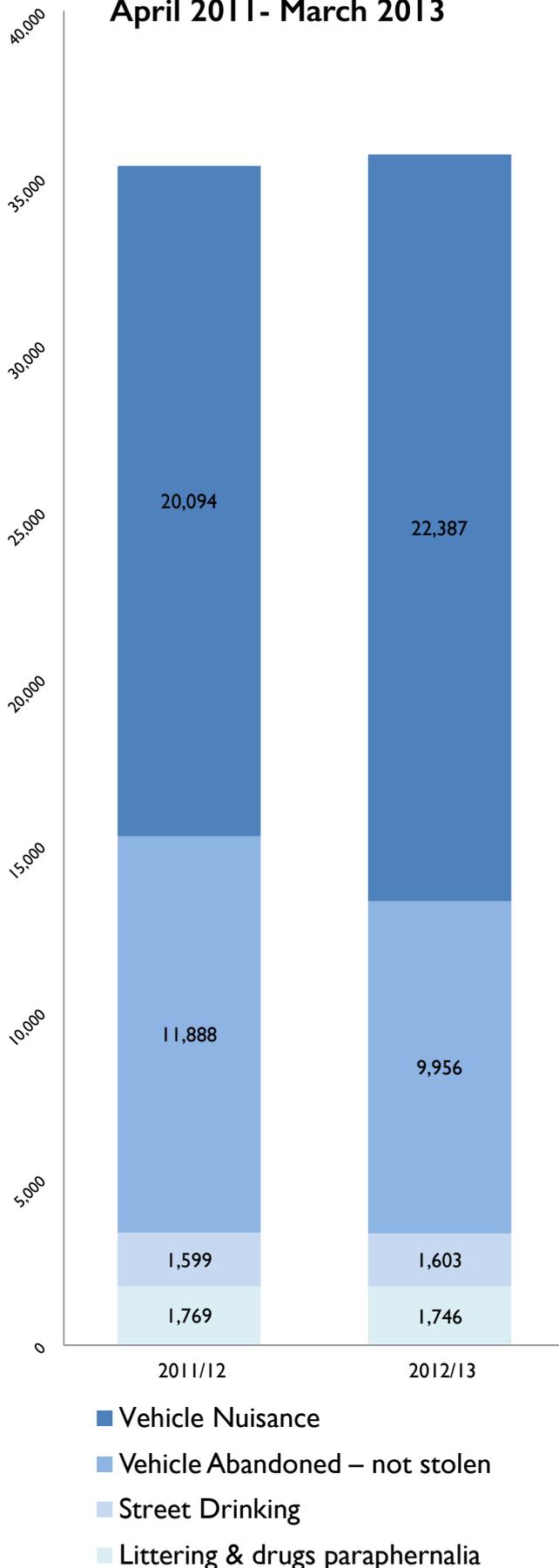
There was a time in my life when I needed a “Block Parent” and a “Block Parent” was there! My life in Spruce Grove, Alberta was not always roses and unicorns. Being “different” (gay) in elementary school and dealing with bullies on a daily basis was not exactly fun or the best way to get exercise either! I remember on one occasion I was being chased home by some kids from my school and I could not run much longer. I always thought that a “Block Parent” would never help a kid like me. Everybody knew who I was on my block and had some pretty strong opinions of me and my family. On that particular day of hell for me, I somehow drummed up the courage to bang on a Block Parents door. I explained my situation to the lady who answered the door and she took me in. I remember crying on her shoulder and feeling comforted by her. She called my parents and kept me there until they picked me up and took me home safely. The main thing that I remember from my Block Parent experience was that I felt “Safe” in her home and welcome too! Who knows what could have happened to me that day if there wasn’t a “Block Parent” in my neighbourhood! THANK YOU BLOCK PARENT!

*Sincerely,
Kane Blacque, Edmonton, AB*

In fact the Block Parent scheme has been discussed in the context of London. A proposal has been drawn up by PC Geoff Lambert of the Metropolitan Police, with the support of both the Block Parent Program and the Safety House Scheme in Australia. Under the title of “London Shield” the concept is very simple - the “London Shield sign represents reassurance and peace of mind and shows that the local community is helping to keep their area a safe place for youngsters” (London Shield Business plan)

¹¹ <http://www.winnipegblockparents.mb.ca/Incidents.html>

Anti Social Behaviour calls made to the MPS centrally from April 2011- March 2013



CITIZEN PATROLS – A PROACTIVE NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

One way of connecting the Safe House concept further to the local community is the promotion of Citizen Patrols. If we look at the figures we can see that antisocial behaviour be a blights local communities.¹²

For those who see Citizen Patrols as outlets for vigilantes or nosey neighbours should be reassured that the system is designed to be non-invasive and always avoiding confrontation. The advantage of Citizen Patrols is the support structures they provide between the police and community. If these patrols were also prepared to be part of the safe house scheme it would create a useful tripartite community security network, along with the local police.

The Citizen Patrol could bring a confidence to the community, especially the vulnerable. People may feel happier talking to a neighbour on patrol about some low level anti-social behaviour rather than a uniformed officer. Children may feel they can approach a community patrol, especially if they are a familiar face.

It is important to stress that this is not a replacement for local policing. These volunteers would be the eyes and ears of the local community allowing the police to focus on the more serious crime prevention and investigation. These patrols are there for support only and would be monitored and approved by the police.

Outside the UK there are good examples of communities becoming actively involved in policing their communities, such as in a number of US states such as Illinois and Texas. These patrols appear to be well established and supported by the local police.

¹². Data is supplied by the Mayors Office of Policing and Crime and uploaded to the London Datastore by the GLA Intelligence Unit.

“Citizens on Patrol volunteers are an invaluable asset to any law enforcement agency. They give us trained eyes and ears out in the community, help reduce crime, and often save us money that can be used for more police officers or needed equipment”

· Police Chief Mike Holder, Colleyville, Texas¹³

Within the UK there are initiatives in various areas such as Street Watch in Bedfordshire and Suffolk and are supported by the local police.

Building trusted brands

Considering the benefit that Safe House and Citizen Patrols can bring to the community, the costs are low. However Safe Houses do require background security checks, home visits and signage which will require some sponsorship of the scheme. This is where local businesses can offer support. Their financial assistance could go to the setup of a local programme. In a mutually beneficial approach the local business is able to promote their brand as part of a local community.

“There is also need to establish widespread recognition of the brand. In Canada the logo is known and trusted – “Kids walking to and from school see Block Parent signs and know that the community cares about them . . . and they just feel more comfortable knowing that the community is looking out for them as well”¹⁴

The “London Shield” business plan referred to earlier did examine the idea of support from established youth organisations. For Safe Houses and Citizen Patrols to reach as many people as possible working with established groups and brands could help significantly. It would certainly tie in with any number of their community liaison schemes by promoting a brand identity familiar to all local communities.

Local business should also be encouraged to promote these programs, which in turn would help their interconnection with local communities. In many ways the scheme could be seen as an extension of the Neighbourhood Watch programme, something that engenders community cohesion.

Harnessing the volunteer spirit in London

There are several considerations to make before this scheme can be established. The safety issues in both acting as a safe house for the vulnerable and patrolling the streets must be of the utmost importance. These patrols and Safe Houses will not be asked to get involved in confrontation as their presence is primarily their as a deterrent. Having Safe Houses would give a confidence to people, to know that someone is there for them should they need it.

Another consideration is building a volunteer base. Modern working patterns may make building this base more difficult, but other programmes such as the Canadian Block Parent Program have been able to build this base by providing flexible requirements to join. Londoners care about the safety of their local areas, and the programme’s success will be on providing simple easy outlets for people to make a difference in their area. It is in the interest of local business and police to foster this base as well as it can provide significant savings in time and general costs when areas are safer. Furthermore, there is a general upwards trend in London towards volunteering;

¹³. http://www.localnewsonly.com/2014/03/news/03/14_03_15citizensonpatrol.htm

¹⁴. <http://www.lfpres.com/news/london/2011/03/25/17759041.html>

"I know that these are challenging times for the voluntary sector and indeed for many people concerned about their own financial prospects. In spite of this, there appears to be no shortage of goodwill among Londoners to play their part in the life of our city - last year over 60% of Londoners volunteered informally, compared to 49% the year before."¹⁵

CONCLUSION

Building safer neighbourhoods is not only the job of the police but of also the citizens that inhabit those communities, however without organisation it is hard to make a stand. It should be a primary goal of the police to provide simple, flexible, and cost effective means to engage the community so they do not miss out on a very important asset in crime prevention. Safe Houses and Citizen Patrols provide these kinds of outlets for the community and should be considered for London. Creating these schemes will give the police valuable connections to the public and people a voice, putting them on a path to building closer communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Safe Houses

Begin a pilot of Safe Houses in five small ward-size communities – a mixture of inner and outer London. Ideally we would use a community group, or parent teacher group who are known to their local Safer Neighbourhood Team, which have already been vetted. This would provide the advantage of having an established network of support on which to successfully build a scheme. If the pilot is successful, we can gradually expand the scheme across other small communities, ultimately having individual projects running side by side in different neighbourhoods.

2. Street patrols

Develop a six month pilot of Citizen Patrols paired with Safer Neighbourhood Teams from the same communities involved in the Safe Houses pilot. Approved and monitored by the police, street patrols would gather information and intelligence on low level crime. It is important to note that Citizen Patrols would not replace local policing, but rather would act as the eyes and ears of the local community and allow the police to focus on preventing and investigating crimes.

3. Funding

We can promote opportunities for businesses to provide the small amount of funding needed for running costs such as window signage, high visibility vests and marketing as required by local Safe Houses and Citizen Patrol schemes. The Block Parent program in Canada runs on \$93k Canadian dollars (about £51k) a year for the entire country – the bulk of the funding raised through private sponsorship.

¹⁵. http://volunteerteam.london.gov.uk/message_from_mayor



FEEDBACK

Connect with us online and tell us what you thought about this paper:

Twitter: [@assembly_tories](#)

Facebook: [facebook.com/glaconservatives](#)

Email: assembly.tories@gmail.com



ANDREW BOFF

LONDON ASSEMBLY

Greater London Authority
City Hall, The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA