

Neighbourhood Watch: Don't mock us, we're crime fighters

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For decades they have been characterised as curtain-twitching busybodies obsessed with low-level crime.

Now the Neighbourhood Watch is hitting back, insisting that its members are at the forefront of the fight against terrorism and human trafficking.

While some may raise an eyebrow at the claim, the group's chief executive said that “lazy stereotyping” of its 2.3 million volunteers ignored their crime-fighting abilities.

“The idea that our members are only concerned with certain types of crime is baffling,” John Hayward-Cripps told *The Times*. He spoke out after David Mitchell, the comedian, suggested that the group would prioritise local crimes over serious offences if put in charge of law enforcement.

“Our volunteers run workshops to stop young people carrying knives, we teach older people to spot the signs of potential scams and we have produced crime-

prevention toolkits that tackle human trafficking and terrorism,” Mr Hayward-Cripps said. “The police are key partners and we enhance the work of very stretched forces.”

Neighbourhood Watch was set up in the early 1980s and its presence in an area has been shown to reduce crime by up to 26 per cent. Residents who join look out for suspicious activities and act as the “eyes and ears” of police.

The group’s terrorism toolkit recommends keeping a look out for anyone who “travels a lot but is vague about where they’re going and why”. Anyone seen buying or receiving deliveries of chemicals, fertilisers or gas cylinders should also be reported, it suggests.

Referring to the nosy *Dandy* character who peeked through people’s doors, Mr Hayward-Cripps said that his volunteers were “often characterised as a group of middle-class Keyhole Kates — spying on the neighbours, interfering in people’s lives”.

He added: “This lazy stereotyping does not reflect the real work of the modern Neighbourhood Watch.”

Some groups have also gone out on the streets. In the village of Huncoat, Lancashire, members said last month that they would run round-the-clock patrols and set up a CCTV system after increases in crime.