

REPORT TO POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 20 December 2018

POLICE SCOTLAND NORTH EAST DIVISION - THEMATIC REPORT: RURAL CRIME

1. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

1.1 Note the attached report which seeks to inform the Committee regarding Rural Crime in general and in Aberdeenshire in particular.

2. Background

- 2.1 Rural crime is considered as any crime that affects those living, working or visiting rural areas and includes theft of property, machinery, vehicles and livestock, along with environmental, heritage and wildlife crime. Each crime type is unique and requires specialist knowledge and strong partnership arrangements to prevent, investigate and detect.
- 2.2 This is particularly relevant to wildlife crime which is already well supported by a network of agencies and dedicated policing resources internationally, nationally and locally within North East Division. Police Scotland are a key member of the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime in Scotland (PAWS).
- 2.3 While recognising there can be some crossover between rural and wildlife crime, for example poaching and hare-coursing, our response to mainstream wildlife crimes including crimes towards certain birds, animals and plants including their habitats, both on land and at sea, is supported through specialist full and part time Wildlife Officers located throughout the North East. The remainder of investigations are led by local Officers working within the heart of our communities alongside local residents and partner organisations.
- 2.4 Aberdeenshire has a rich and diverse heritage, with some 2,437 square miles of the most idyllic countryside and coastlines in the country right on our doorstep. However, people in remote or rural areas can often feel particularly vulnerable because of their isolation. While policing rural areas can present different challenges, it is important we collectively listen, understand and respond to what matters the most to any community whether they are city, urban, rural or remote. The standard of service provided cannot and will not be defined by location but policing must be agile enough to adapt to different locations.
- 2.5 Our rural communities are safe places to live, work visit and enjoy. However, the financial cost of crime on rural businesses can be significant, and for victims in these areas it can go beyond the cost of simply replacing stolen property. It often includes the loss of earnings, hiring of replacement vehicles

and increased insurance premiums. It can involve replacing livestock, crops and business grown over generations.

- 2.6 The remoteness of rural locations can attract criminals into the area intent on committing crime. Serious and Organised Crime Groups (SOCG's) are often linked to rural, heritage and wildlife crime particularly in relation to theft of agricultural machinery, livestock, poaching, hare-coursing and Cannabis cultivations. Evidence suggests this may be relevant within the North East with examples of SOCG's involved in a diverse range of crimes from cattle and plant thefts to the large scale manufacturing and distribution of Cannabis and other drugs in the area.
- 2.7 It has previously been estimated by Insurance companies that rural crime costs the Scottish economy an estimated £2 million per annum.
- 2.8 This paper details the current picture and our response to crimes in rural areas including the development of existing and new innovative partnership arrangements that remain relevant, appropriate and effective for delivering lean and agile policing centred on the changing requirements of our customers, services and communities for now and the future.

3. Current Picture

- 3.1 In August 2018, updated figures issued by rural insurer NFU Mutual for 2017, revealed a welcomed decrease in the cost of claims from rural crimes in Scotland of 3.8% whereas in the rest of the UK, they increased by 13.4% from £4.3 million to £44.5 million.
- 3.2 To give some wider perspective, of the UK regions, Wales saw the sharpest rise in the cost of rural crime, up 41% in 2017. The North East was the only region in England which reported a fall, with the figure down 6.5%.
- 3.3 Here in the North East of Scotland, rural crime has reduced by 34% over the last three years, while detection rates have risen by 10.5%.
- 3.4 Wildlife crime is down 32% in the same period. Hare-coursing remains the most prolific wildlife crime in the North East, however, incidents of hare-coursing are down 80% last year from the same period the previous year.
- 3.5 A total of £127,605.00 worth of livestock has been stolen over the last four years from across the North East with £21,750.00 worth of livestock safely recovered during the same period.
- 3.6 Livestock worrying increased in 2017/18, up 8 incidents on the previous year, with detection rates also increasing to 73.3% during same period. This comes at a time of increased awareness raising campaigns by the Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime (SPARC) and other partner agencies designed to encourage greater prevention and reporting of this type of incident.
- 3.7 Over the past four years 63 agricultural vehicles have been stolen from across the North East, worth a total of £245,119.00. This includes 25 quad bikes, 15

tractors, 13 trailers, 5 diggers and 3 forklifts. The value of recovered vehicles is £138,400.00.

- 3.8. Some of the vehicles were recovered in Glasgow and Merseyside, while another two were located in Lithuania.
- 3.9. 25% of all Cannabis cultivations discovered within the North East of Scotland have been within a remote or rural location.
- 3.10. Acquisitive Crime in Aberdeenshire fell sharply during 2017/18. Significant overall reductions occurred across each crime type while detection rates continued to be considerably higher than the Scottish average.
- 3.11. Rural housebreakings amount for under a quarter of all house-breakings reported in the North East. Housebreakings in communities across Aberdeenshire decreased by 107 crimes in 2017/18 compared to the previous year, which represents a reduction of over 42% compared to the 5 Year Average. Detection rates have increased by over 17% to almost 37%.

4. Our Response

- 4.1 As local communities throughout the North East continue to diversify, we recognised policing must adapt to remain relevant and legitimate. The needs of communities are changing. Demands on the emergency services remain on preventing and detecting crime and keeping people safe but increasingly resources are focused on addressing vulnerability.
- 4.2 There is a strong track record of collaboration and partnership working across the North East going back many years. This is vital in maintaining and improving the safety and wellbeing of people, places and communities across the region and elsewhere.
- 4.3 In recognising our communities have different needs, and that a 'one size fits all' approach was unlikely to deliver success, it's crucial our policing service and operational response reflects the true needs and demands of our communities, be they remote, rural, urban or city.
- 4.4 Local policing lies at the heart of our policing model. It allows us to increase visibility and accessibility and encourages people to talk and share their knowledge of their communities in order to help solve local issues or highlight vulnerabilities and risk. This helps to deliver a wider spread of local preventative measures, resources and a greater capacity to work with communities and partners to address local concerns.
- 4.5 We developed local Officers with greater focus on the range of crimes which occur in remote and rural areas. We have also taken opportunities to maximise the availability, skills and experience of Special Constables to increase visibility in more rural communities to build on existing relationships with those living and working in the area.
- 4.6 A member of the senior management team was appointed lead for rural crime and safety to highlight its importance within local policing. The Officer links in

directly with national representatives of SPARC (Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime) and other partners.

- 4.7 It's well recognised, the demand from those who need us most is growing and it was quickly identified a new partnership approach was required to help maintain and build services for the benefit of users and communities, which do not recognise silos.
- 4.8 The North East Rural Crime and Safety Partnership was established and now involves senior representatives from over 25 organisations and stakeholders involved in rural affairs and the rural economy, with the aim of building a co-operative approach to identifying and tackling rural crime and promoting safety.
- 4.9 The Partnership developed a new strategy (attached) which protects our rural communities through a focus on prevention, intelligence, enforcement and reassurance.
- 4.10 The strategy addresses hidden harms and vulnerabilities often unreported or less visible. It provides coherence, direction and guidance and delivers meaningful outcomes that benefit communities across the North East and elsewhere. The participating organisations use the strategy to influence activities to keep communities safe.
- 4.11 Internal governance structures were introduced to review each rural crime and ensure the most appropriate resource from Community Policing, Divisional Alcohol & Violence Reduction Unit (DAVRU), CID or other specialists, are used to maximise investigative opportunities. This was a significant catalyst in developing and delivering the new Rural Crime & Safety Strategy, in particular the level of joint working and problem solving, which has been instrumental in achieving the above positive results and indeed the levels and scope of partnership working which has evolved in the months that followed its introduction.
- 4.12 For example, Operation BlackFalls was launched to educate the public on the consequences and response to hare-coursing as well as our actions to bring offenders to Court. Since the start of the operation, 14 named accused have been reported to the Procurator Fiscal, with four vehicles seized which were identified as being used in the commission of these crimes. Community Policing Teams, as well as officers from DAVRU, have been carrying out extensive enquiries to identify and trace offenders throughout the division. Officers are also utilising ASBO legislation in a bid to limit the impact individuals have on local communities. It is believed the 100% detection rate for 2016/17 and the subsequent significant reduction in crimes during 2017/18, is due to some extent to the success of this operation and the ongoing management of offenders.
- 4.13 The strategy sets out a framework for the North East Rural Crime and Safety Partnership to support rural community safety. The strategy identifies how we



will seek to prevent crime both as a partnership and with local people and how as a collective, we will respond effectively to incidents, risks and the potential for harm in order to tackle crime and promote safety.

- 4.14 This strategy supports the needs and expectations of our communities. It reflects the Community Planning Partnerships across Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray and supports the different Local Outcome Improvement Plans (LOIP) across the North East. It is designed to assist partner organisations with developing and delivering their own strategic plans for the North East.
- 4.15 The partnership arrangements also help identify alternative routes to support individuals and communities, including through charities such as RSABI (formerly known as The Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institute) which offers emotional, practical and financial support in times of need to those who have been involved in farming, crofting and growing or are the dependants of someone who has been involved in these industries.
- 4.16 It presents real opportunity to rethink our engagement, communication and network of effective partnerships and consider a series of collaborative possibilities at strategic and operational levels to enable the creation of truly innovative partnership working that is community and future focused.
- 4.17 As already evidenced herein, a great deal of progress has been made across the North East. Working across partners to maximise every opportunity of success and co-ordinating intelligence has already led to several interventions in respect of rural crimes, while collectively engaging with the wider community helps to ensure we respond to their needs and communicate what we are doing.
- 4.18 Positive and structured use of the Media, in all of its forms from print, television, radio and internet have been key component of the new strategy. Community engagement with the many different organisations representing rural businesses and affairs, as well as communities and visitors alike, is a key area of ongoing work.
- 4.19 We continue to grow 'Rural Watch Scotland' which is an extension of the Neighbourhood Watch Scotland movement and endorsed by SPARC. Rural Watch is aimed specifically at the rural communities of Scotland and aims to bring all the benefits of Neighbourhood Watch to all rural communities irrespective of location, size or demographics. There is good evidence of communities participating in the scheme with two thousand recipients across the North East.
- 4.20 In order to demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach to local policing in the North East, during March 2018, the Rural Crime and Safety Lead was selected from all Local Policing Divisions across Police Scotland to present to a Cross Party Group at the Scottish Parliament on Rural Policy to discuss rural policing in Scotland. A record number of MSP's attended the partnership event.
- 4.21 The introduction of additional measures, the partnership and strategy has caught the attention of other policing Divisions and the interest of Forces in

England who have sought additional information with a view to replicating the arrangements elsewhere.

- 4.22 There remains much work to be done to support our local communities but this local approach to policing inspires and empowers local Officers to respond to and address the concerns from local communities and individuals across the North East.

5. Scheme of Governance

- 5.1 The Committee is able to consider/comment on this item in terms of Section D.1.1 of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as it relates to matters concerning Police Scotland.

6. Equalities, Staffing, Financial and Risk Implications

- 6.1 An equality impact assessment is not required because this report is principally designed in regard to Rural Crime. There will be no differential impact, as a result of the report, on people with protected characteristics.
- 6.2 There are no specific staffing or financial implications arising from this report.
- 6.3 There are no risks directly identified in respect of this matter in terms of the Corporate and Directorate Risk Registers as the Committee is monitoring the performance of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service as required under the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 however links to the Corporate Risk of Working with Other Organisations.

Richie Johnson
Director of Business Services

Report prepared by: T/Superintendent Murray Main
Date: 22 November 2018



North East Scotland Rural Crime & Safety Partnership

Rural Crime & Safety Strategy

2018 - 2020



FOREWORD



There are many benefits to living, visiting, working and investing in the North East of Scotland. We are justifiably proud of our rural and beautiful countryside and coastal areas which cover over 3370 square miles and

have many internationally renowned areas of outstanding natural beauty. Along with its extraordinary architectural, agricultural and cultural heritage, attractions, events and historical sites of considerable interest, this contributes significantly to the health of our economy and well-being of our communities.

It is important we collectively listen, understand and respond to what matters the most to our communities whether they are city, urban, rural or remote. The standard of service cannot and will not be defined by location but must be agile enough to adapt to different locations. The demand from those who need us most is growing and the partnership will help each organisation to maintain and build services for the benefit of users and communities, and do not recognise silos.

I am glad that the North East is one of the safest areas of the United Kingdom, but I recognise that we continue to face difficult challenges. As partner organisations, we need to work closely with rural communities to tackle issues such as agricultural and road safety; acquisitive crime, especially from rural locations; sheep worrying, hare coursing and other wildlife crimes. We need to work together to protect the most vulnerable from those who seek to cause them harm and work hard to help those who need additional support.

As local communities throughout the North East continue to diversify, organisations must adapt to remain relevant and legitimate. The needs of communities are changing. Demands on the emergency services remain on preventing and detecting crime and keeping people safe but increasingly resources are focused on addressing vulnerability.

This strategy reflects the needs and expectations of our communities. It reflects the Community Planning Partnerships across Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray and supports the Local Outcome Improvement Plans (LOIP) across the North East. It is designed to assist partner organisations with developing and delivering their own strategic plans for the North East.

It presents real opportunity to rethink our engagement, communication and network of effective partnerships and consider a series of collaborative possibilities at strategic and operational levels to enable the creation of truly innovative partnership working that is community and future focused.

The strategy sets out a framework for the North East Rural Crime and Safety Partnership to support rural community safety. The strategy identifies how we will seek to prevent crime and antisocial behaviour both as a partnership and with local people and how as a collective, we will respond effectively to incidents, risk and the potential for harm.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Murray Main'. The signature is stylized and fluid.

Murray Main
Chief Inspector
Chair of the North East Scotland
Rural Crime & Safety Partnership

THE CONTENT

The North East of Scotland is one of the safest parts of the United Kingdom. It is also a popular destination for many tourists throughout the year for our rich history, heritage, beautiful countryside, sport and leisure attractions.

The North East Rural Crime and Safety Partnership involves senior representatives from organisations and stakeholders involved in rural affairs and the rural economy, with the aim of building a co-operative approach to identifying and tackling rural crime and promoting safety.

A vital part of our role is ensuring our rural communities are protected and feel safe. Key to our success is ensuring residents have access to appropriate services and are able to influence what we do.

The strategy recognises rural communities can face unique issues, which is why we have strengthened our partnership relationships and arrangements.

This strategy is about protecting our rural communities through a focus on **prevention, intelligence, enforcement and reassurance**. It addresses hidden harm issues and vulnerability often unreported and less visible.

It provides coherence, direction and guidance and will deliver meaningful outcomes that benefit communities across the North East and elsewhere. The participating organisations will use the strategy to influence activities to keep communities safe.



UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES

Understanding and effectively responding to the needs of our communities lies at the heart of what we each do every day. Effective engagement, local planning and partnership work enables national and local organisations to understand community needs and expectations.

Many risks, concerns and crimes are common to rural, city and urban areas such as vulnerability, domestic abuse, cybercrime, road collisions, theft and serious sexual offences, but the challenge of preventing and mitigating risk, helping others or solving crime is often exacerbated by remoteness and isolation. While the focus on preventing crime and improving safety will be maintained irrespective of geographical area, there are challenges specific to rural areas and this strategy enables the partnership to confront the threat, risk and harm in a more timely and effective manner.

Many criminals feel the countryside provides rich and easy pickings. This together with the increased sophistication of organised criminals profiting from crime such as theft of property, plant, equine and livestock, can heighten the feeling of vulnerability and fear of crime in rural locations.

A great deal of progress has already been made across the North East. Working across partners to maximise every opportunity of success and co-ordinating intelligence has already led to several interventions in respect of rural crime while collectively engaging with the wider community helps to ensure we respond to their needs.

This strategy supports the partnership approach to:

- Protect vulnerable people;
- Focus on prevention and early intervention;
- Cut crime and antisocial behaviour;
- Promote and ensure Animal Welfare;
- Improve community well-being;
- Support the rural economy and environment.



THE STRATEGY

Prevention

In partnership with stakeholders we will look for **early intervention** opportunities to prevent incidents that cause threat, risk and harm taking place, being **creative and innovative** in order to increase rural safety and well-being and prevent rural crimes and incidents from occurring

We will:

- Maintain a visible presence, and all organisations will be accessible and provide an effective response in rural communities;
- Enhance existing and new relationships, collaborative work streams and information sharing to deliver better outcomes for service users, communities and partners;
- Recruit and develop our community to self-help, working with key partners in the blue light services and public, private and third sectors;
- Provide safety and crime reduction advice to residents, businesses and visitors on how to stay safe and protect their property from opportunist criminals. We will work in partnership, maximising technology through the use of 'Rural Watch Scotland' and other messaging tools, Websites, media releases and through public engagement events;
- Support the work of other partners and third sector organisations to provide support, guidance and friendship to individuals and families, including those with increased risk due to isolation, mental or physical well-being;
- Continue to develop the specialist rural skills and knowledge of our staff and promote fire, safety and crime prevention advice;
- Safeguard Animal Health and Welfare, wildlife and fisheries for the benefit of people, the environment and the economy;
- Increase the number of eyes and ears in our rural communities and encourage local communities to join messaging systems including community alert systems and 'Rural Watch Scotland';
- Identify those most vulnerable within our rural community, particularly repeat victims of crime and ensure we respond to their needs;
- Support the North East Scotland Road Casualty Strategic Group on road safety and protect vulnerable road users.



Intelligence

It is important that we **listen to what people tell us and act upon it**. Through our organisations, we will work together and provide relevant information to help people take preventative action themselves.

We need to encourage more people living in rural communities to remain safe, report concerns, crime, and intelligence to inform our collective response. We will improve the way we use and share information to identify rural challenges and problems and through assessment of threat, risk and harm determine the options we can use to improve well-being and deter and disrupt criminality.

We will:

- Identify those individuals and groups who cause most harm to our rural communities;
- Encourage people to report crimes and incidents to the police so we can be better informed;
- Improve our understanding of criminality by sharing information with other agencies and develop intelligence on hidden harm crimes including human trafficking and modern slavery;
- Improve our understanding of victims and locations at risk or being targeted by criminals, enabling us to better prevent and protect;
- Continue to develop opportunities and infrastructures in order to disrupt travelling criminals;
- Improve the way we provide information to our rural communities about crime and safety issues;
- Ensure we have the processes and resources to gather information and react appropriately to incidents when they occur;
- Communicate back to people who have provided information or assistance.



Enforcement

We will enforce the law and target those areas of crime and those offenders who cause the most harm to our communities, animals, economy and environment.

We will:

- Work with rural communities, partners, businesses, 'Rural Watch Scotland', Neighbourhood Watch Schemes and CrimeStoppers to increase prevention, reporting and detection of crime and improvement in safety and well-being;
- Ensure partner organisations collectively employ an intelligence led approach to crime and concerns, improving our opportunity for positive outcomes;
- Continually work together to employ early intervention, not waiting until things have got so bad, but recognising the emerging issue and reducing risks;
- Ensure an effective partnership response to reports of rural crime and concerns;
- Work together with communities, partners and organisations to support local priorities and meet the Local Outcome Improvement Plans;
- Work with legal partners in Local Authorities to consider the use of legislation to manage offenders and those who cause antisocial behaviour in our communities;
- Be creative and innovative in respect of how we protect our community and hold those who offend to account;
- Ensure specialist staff co-ordinate rural crime reduction initiatives and advise on wildlife and rural crime investigations and operations;
- Provide fire safety, road safety and crime reduction advice and target hardening guidance to individuals or locations which are or may become vulnerable.



Reassurance

We want to **work with communities** to ensure that people working, visiting or living in our rural areas **feel safe and are safe**. Effective two-way communication, local engagement and reassurance all have a role to play in giving communities across the North East confidence in the partnership approach.

We will:

- Make sure we understand the impact of crime and antisocial behaviour on rural communities and work together to provide an excellent service at the first point of contact;
- Improve the way we communicate with our rural communities and encourage the use of 'Rural Watch Scotland';
- Support vulnerable members of the community, including older people living in rural areas, not only with the adverse actions of others but also to access information and help with finance, health and social care, loneliness and isolation;
- Keep communities updated on current trends, activity and outcomes of the partnership, including greater use of virtual opportunities and both the mainstream and social media;
- Make the partnership more visible and accessible in rural communities;
- Support the drive to increase the number of eyes and ears across rural communities;
- Conduct partnership meetings to listen to and act upon the concerns of rural communities;
- Seek feedback from people living in the North East rural communities on the way we are working together to deliver this strategy.



NORTH EAST SCOTLAND RURAL CRIME & SAFETY WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

