

CAMBRIDGESHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL	Agenda Item No. 9
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Report of Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Commissioner

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RURAL CRIME

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to report to Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Panel (“the Panel”) how Cambridgeshire Constabulary (“the Constabulary”) tackle rural crime and what support mechanisms are in place for Special Constables in rural areas.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To note the report.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 3.1 Item 6 – To review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, by the Police and Crime Commissioner in connection with the discharge of the Commissioner’s functions.
- Item 8 – To support the effective exercise of the functions of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Policing Protocol Order 2011 (“the Protocol”) sets out some key guiding principles for all Police and Crime Commissioners, Chief Constables and Police and Crime Panels.
- 4.2 Under the Protocol, the Police and Crime Commissioner (“the Commissioner”) has the legal power to scrutinise, support and challenge the overall performance of the Constabulary and hold the Chief Constable to account for the performance of the Constabulary’s officers and staff. The Protocol is clear that the Commissioner must not fetter the operational independence of the Constabulary and the Chief Constable. Preventing and tackling reported offences of rural crime and the deployment and support to the Special Constabulary are operational matters.
- 4.3 In turn, the Protocol enables the Panel to scrutinise the Commissioner in the exercise of his statutory functions, but does not provide for the Panel to scrutinise the Chief Constable. However, in the spirit of the Protocol to enhance policing for local communities, the Commissioner has provided this report, which predominately relates to the actions of the Constabulary and its current policies and operations in keeping Cambridgeshire’s rural communities protected against ‘rural crime’.

5. RURAL CRIME

5.1 There is no nationally accepted definition of rural crime but it is recognised that it goes beyond mere theft and includes offences, which impact on the quality of rural life and the fear of crime in isolated communities. The Constabulary's definition of rural crime is as follows:

- A crime or incident type which occurs in any geographical area ordinarily described as 'rural', and where the criminal activity is more prevalent in, or unique to, rural areas.

5.2 The Constabulary recognise the following as constituting rural crime:

- If the offence occurred at a: farm barn, farm shop, farm building, farm yard, farm house, farm field, fish farm;
- **Or** the property involved is: agricultural machinery, agricultural tools, fencing, hay/straw, heating oil and red diesel, horses and or tack, horse boxes, livestock;
- **And** the offence is: burglary, robbery, theft, criminal damage, offences of public health offences (fly tipping) and wildlife offences, hare coursing and poaching.

5.3 However it is acknowledged that within communities established in rural areas, crimes such as speeding and illegal/nuisance parking are prevalent. It is also acknowledged that those living in some particularly rural areas have a tendency to feel more 'isolated' which can increase feelings of vulnerability to being victims of dwelling burglary and/or vehicle theft.

5.4 These crime types occur across rural and urbanised areas and are not encapsulated by the constabularies' very specific definition of 'rural crime'.

6. POLICE RESPONSIBILITIES, GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

6.1 The police are the lead agency for tackling many aspects of rural crime, however the variety of rural crime types necessitates a multi-agency response. The police are not the lead agency for some of the most prevalent rural crimes such as fly-tipping (Environmental Health/District Councils), stack fires (the Fire Service), and rural anti-social behaviour (shared responsibility with local authorities).

6.2 The core response to rural crime still rests with the Constabulary's Rural Crime Action Team, part of the Criminal Investigation Bureau, which is capable of deploying force-wide and providing expert advice for all front line officers.

6.3 The Constabulary holds a quarterly rural community action group bringing together representatives from all local policing commands, the National Farmers Union (NFU), Countryside Watch, Community Safety Partnerships, the Fire Service and District Councils. This group then reports into the Eastern Region Rural Crime Group. This group also meets quarterly and includes representation from police forces across the East of England as well as the Fire Service, the Environment Agency, NFU and NFU Mutual, Countryside Watch, Farm Watch and the Countryside Landowners Association. The purpose of this group is to share best practice, information and intelligence, to identify trends and support cross-border working.

6.4 In addition, both the Commissioner and the Constabulary are members of the National Rural Crime Network, a forum working to see greater recognition and understanding of the problems and impact of crime in rural areas so more can be done to keep people safe. By collaborating together and working at national level, the Network highlights the key issues that affect rural communities, rural businesses and the impact of rural crime and anti-social behaviour.

7. SPECIAL CONSTABULARY

7.1 The Special Constabulary is a group of trained volunteers who work with and support the Constabulary. Special Constables come from all walks of life and they all volunteer a minimum of sixteen hours a month to the Constabulary, forming a vital link between the regular police and the local community. Once Special Constables have completed their training, they have

the same powers as regular officers and wear a similar uniform.

- 7.2 In Cambridgeshire, the Special Constabulary has been fully integrated into most areas of policing including Roads Policing Unit, Public Protection Department and the dog section. Special Constables are therefore an integrated part of the Constabulary's strategic and operational deployment plans. Special Constables are tasked and deployed alongside their regular colleagues, including policing rural crimes.
- 7.3 As of January 2016, there were 281 Special Constables in Cambridgeshire donating, on Average, 21.6 hours each month.

8. POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER'S ROLE

- 8.1 The Commissioner has identified issues affecting rural communities in his Police and Crime Plan ("the Plan"). Specifically the Commissioner's pledge that policing cannot be one size fits all, different local communities face different local problems and therefore local needs must be met. Rural crime is no less important than crimes that occur more specifically in urban area, i.e. in the towns and cities. The pledge states that the Constabulary should focus on the individual needs of each community and see that the resources allocated are delivering positive outcomes, both in how they deal with rural crime as well as with crime that affects rural areas.
- 8.2 Local policing teams are also supported by active local watch groups such as Countryside Watch and Neighbourhood Watch. The Commissioner has given funding of £25,337 to Countryside Watch over the period 2013-2015/16, with the intention to provide funding for 2016/17. Countryside Watch offers support and assistance to members, many of whom are agricultural business owners, who are affected by rural crime. The Commissioner has also given funding of over £5,000 to Neighbourhood Watch Groups across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough during 2013-16. Many of these Neighbourhood Watch Groups are established and active in rural areas. The Commissioner is very aware that many living in rural communities have complaints about speeding through their villages as commuters try and avoid congested 'major routes'. Speedwatch is very actively promoted and supported by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- 8.3 The Commissioner's Plan recognises that Special Constables are an integral part of modern policing and form a vital link between the regular Constabulary and the local community. The Commissioner's pledge is to see the numbers of Special Constables increased from those when he took office.
- 8.4 The Commissioner has regularly held the Chief Constable to account for the Constabulary's work both on tackling rural crime and the number of Special Constables. This has been done through requesting and considering papers to his Business Co-ordination Board and through his Performance Working Group.
- 8.5 One of the Commissioners most prominent pledges in the Plan is to be the voice of the public. He frequently receives correspondence from members of the rural community bringing their issues and concerns to his attention. Receiving public feedback in this way enables the commissioner to listen to public concerns and hold the Chief Constable to account on these issues accordingly.
- 8.6 The Commissioner has two Outreach Workers, who cover both the north and the south of county, whose role is to carry out outreach and engagement activity. By listening to members of the rural community, frequently attending public/parish meetings, they are able to feedback people's views and opinions to the commissioner, They hold regular meetings with Countryside Watch Coordinators and representatives from the NFU, working in partnership wherever the opportunity arises, to help the rural communities protect themselves against crime. The Outreach Workers were involved in the planning of the 'Rural Crime Days of Action' in November 2015 and attended all five community engagement events. The commissioner was able to fund a 'Rural Crime Essentials' Card based on feedback from the rural communities and their support groups about the barriers to reporting crime. This card was deemed a useful resource for the rural community.

9. OPERATIONAL POLICING INITIATIVES, TRAINING AND PLANNED WORK

- 9.1 The Constabulary recognises that rural crime is far too wide-spread to be tackled solely by specialists. For this reason the Constabulary has embarked on the largest ever training programme for front line officers in rural crime. Over 400 officers across the Constabulary have received rural crime training, normally taking place in farm-settings and delivered with the assistance of Countryside Watch and NFU.
- 9.2 Examples of specific operations tackling seasonal aspects of rural crime are: Operation Dallas (heating oil theft), Operation Balboa (Christmas rural crime), Operation Cushman (protecting isolated rural post offices), Operation Armitage (arson and stack fires in collaboration with the Fire Service), and Operation Oaklands (crime prevention in small rural communities).
- 9.3 The Rural Crime Days of Action A force-wide Rural Crime Action Day was a police lead and multi-agency day which included enforcement actions, crime prevention, community engagement and front line officer awareness raising. The day involved front line officers, Joint Protective Services and the Special Constabulary, as well as an array of partner agencies. This was followed up with a series of five 'Barn Meetings' – community engagement events run with the material support of local farmers, Countryside Watch and the NFU and located across the county.
- 9.4 In response to listening to the concerns of those in rural communities, the Chief Constable has committed funding to having a dedicated full time rural crime team of six posts. The Team will focus on rural issues but also be a substantive reserve for other Constabulary policing matters when required. The Commissioner supports this approach, one that demonstrates continued commitment to rural communities alongside the existing efforts that are in place.

10. SPECIAL CONSTABULARY SUPPORTING RURAL POLICING

- 10.1 Six Special Constables have established a rural tactical team. This is a proactive team that work alongside the intelligence bureau to target rural crime across the county. They deploy in pairs or with their regular colleagues.
- 10.2 As for practical support whilst on duty in rural areas, Special Constables have the same radio links as their regular colleagues as well as the same Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) which includes a baton and incapacitant spray. Special Constables also have access to the same support mechanisms as their regular colleagues.
- 10.3 The Constabulary are piloting a Parish Constable role. This specialist role will support local parishes to proactively and reactively address issues in the local area. The pilot will initially be launched in East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire as they have a significant number of rural communities within their boundaries. One Special Sergeant will head up the team and two Special Constables have been selected for the specialist role. Clusters of parishes are being identified in the pilot areas and the Parish Constables will be in place by April 2016. The pilot will be fully evaluated six months after implementation. External recruitment has also been launched for the role of Parish Constable.

11. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

'Rural Policing', Business Co-ordination Board, July 2015

<http://www.cambridgeshire-pcc.gov.uk/work/business-coordination-board/2015-2/bcb-july-14-2015/>

'Special Constabulary support for Rural Crime, Business Co-ordination Board, February 2016
<http://www.cambridgeshire-pcc.gov.uk/work/business-coordination-board/2016-2/bcb-february-25th-2016/>