

APPENDIX E - RURAL CRIME TEAM

RURAL CRIME TEAM

Update for the Police and Crime Panel, 16th March 2020

By Inspector Allison Wiggin

Introduction

The county of Warwickshire has a diverse mix of communities, covering both rural and urban areas. The challenge for the police has always been to deliver a consistent policing service across all areas in the face of the high demands that are brought about by the more densely populated urban areas.

Crime in rural areas has changed from opportunistic thieves to organised criminal gangs that target and exploit rural communities across a range of crime types, from organised theft of agricultural machinery to large numbers of livestock destined for illegal meat markets. Combined with the increase in media attention, this has led to a heightened fear of crime within rural communities.

Policing these large areas comes with its own unique challenges and achieving police coverage at all times is sadly unachievable. However, more can be done to address the concerns of rural communities, who often feel particularly vulnerable as the impact of incidents or crimes can be higher where people may feel more vulnerable because of their isolated location.

This makes it particularly important that we meet the aims of the Rural Crime Strategy that runs in parallel with both the priorities of the Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) and those of the National Rural Affairs Strategy.

Rural Crime Advisors

A lot of progress has already been made in addressing rural crime. This has principally been achieved by the three Rural Crime Advisors (RCA) funded by the PCC during his term of office. They provide expertise and bespoke crime prevention advice, as well improving engagement with rural communities by working closely with the NFU and other partners to organise a series of rural crime events across the county. In addition, the initiatives that have produced the Rural Watch website and the Supported Villages Scheme have continued to go from strength to strength.

It has however been recognised that there is more to do, including the investment of additional resources to focus on rural crime and through strengthening relationships with neighbouring forces, partners, regional and national agencies to effectively understand and respond to criminality in rural areas.

Rural Crime Team

Whilst the Safer Neighbourhood Teams will continue to be the predominant face of policing to communities, a dedicated Warwickshire Rural Crime Team (RCT) has been created to specifically to focus on these matters. The team presently consist of a police inspector, a sergeant and four constables, complemented by the aforementioned three PCC funded Rural Crime Advisors.

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Rural Crime

One of the main challenges is in defining 'rural crime'. The definition that is commonly used by police forces is: - *'Any crime or antisocial behaviour that takes place in a rural location.'*¹

Given such a broad definition of rural crime, the RCT will prioritise its activity on the offence types that cause significant harm to rural communities, businesses and the farming community. The focus will be on the following themes: -

Thematic Areas

- i. **Farm Machinery, plant and vehicle theft.** Including quad bikes and all-terrain vehicles, vintage tractors, caravans, tools and equipment.
- ii. **Livestock Offences.** Theft and livestock worrying.
- iii. **Fuel Theft.** Including heating oil, diesel and petrol, promote crime prevention.
- iv. **Equine Crime.** Including horse, equipment, tack theft and neglect.
- v. **Fly Tipping.** Including household and commercial waste and organised criminality.
- vi. **Heritage Crime.** Offences which harm the value of England's heritage assets and their settings.

Crime Recording and Analytics

The recording of rural crime has proved challenging for most police forces, but the RCT has developed an approach through the use of a key word search on all reported incidents. Having an overview of these crimes and incidents is essential in order to identify trends and patterns.

Learning and Development

One of the first challenges to be faced was to get rural crime accepted as daily business and part of mainstream policing rather than a specialist topic relying on the skills and time of a few officers.

A key element of the work undertaken to date has been in educating staff in the Operations Communication Centre, as they often are the first point of contact for victims of rural crime. Enhancing their knowledge through regular training sessions provides a better service to the public and ensures the most appropriate response to their concerns. This learning and developments has been extended to include student police officer as they undertake their initial training.

Strategic Delivery

Prevention

In partnership with key stakeholders the RCT will raise the profile of the rural community and the issues faced by it by: -

¹ *Rural locations are defined using the DEFRA / ONS 2004 output areas (excluding market towns), but including hamlet, isolated dwelling and village output areas.

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- Empowering local businesses and communities to protect themselves through advice and guidance on crime prevention.
- Ensuring victim referrals to specially trained rural crime officers to reduce the chance of repeat victimisation and prevent further harm.
- Developing the specialist knowledge and skills of the RCT and ensuring they have the right equipment to do the job.
- Promoting the use of social media and police websites to get key messages on emerging threats or issues disseminated to the rural community in a timely manner.
- Supporting effective Rural Watch schemes.
- Working with Community Safety Partnerships to engage rural communities and support crime reduction.
- Continuing investment in the Supported Villages Scheme.
- Delivering effective community engagement.

Intelligence

Engaging and listening to the concerns of the rural community is at the very heart of the RCT. This focus will improve the sharing of intelligence with partners, neighbouring forces and other key individuals in order to enrich the intelligence picture and thereby prevent, disrupt and detect criminal activity. Specifically: -

- Improve the cross border sharing of intelligence to better understand and target organised criminal gangs.
- Improve on the way the communication and sharing of information with key individuals and partners.
- Encourage the reporting of crimes and incidents to the police.
- Identify those that are causing the most harm to rural communities and that all opportunities are seized in capturing intelligence.
- Have appropriate processes in place to recognise and capture rural crime intelligence at first point of contact.
- Ensure 'golden hour' principles of evidence capture are maximised in rural crimes and seize all available forensic opportunities.

Enforcement

To target offenders who cause the most harm and those localities that are most affected: -

- Ensuring an effective police response to reports of rural and wild life crime.
- Routinely carrying out operations with partners, neighbouring police forces and other organisations targeting rural crime.

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- Developing new ways of working with rural communities and watch schemes to jointly tackle crime.
- Providing advice and subject matter expertise to investigating officers.
- In matters of serious, complex or repeat victims of rural crime, taking ownership to provide an effective police response.

Reassurance

To work with communities, ensuring that people living and working in rural areas feel safe and are confident in the ways they can communicate with the police. The RCT will achieve this by: -

- Supporting effective watch schemes to help improve communication with rural communities.
- Improving the way communication with rural communities, providing timely updates on current trends, activities or emerging threats.
- Providing an input with all newly trained officers on the principles of the rural crime strategy.
- Actively seeking feedback from rural communities in how effective the RCT are in delivering the aims and objectives of this strategy.
- Engaging fully with National Farmers Union (NFU), Country Land & Business associations.
- Making the police more visible in rural areas through public engagement events.

The support of the public is a critical factor in the success of tackling rural criminality. Making rural communities even safer places to live, work and visit relies on engagement, partnership working and the confidence of local people to report suspicious activity. Warwickshire Police remain committed to this approach.

Activity

Following the launch of the Rural Crime Team on the 7th October 2019 the team have been busy engaging with the rural community around the county, following up on incidents, recovering stolen property and serving a number of warrants, plus working with our cross border forces.

Engagement

The events and meeting attended include: -

- Every AGM held by the NFU around the county.
- Regional West Midlands and East Midlands Wildlife and Rural Crime strategy meetings.
- Country Land Owners (CLA) AGM.
- Heritage Crime Day.
- Heritage Crime Regional meeting,
- Young Farmers meeting in Dunchurch.
- Stratford and Stoneleigh livestock markets.

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- Environment Agency meeting.
- British Horse Society meeting.
- Fillongley and Maxstoke events with the local SNT.

Headlines

Suspected Poaching Offence.



On the 01/02/2020 the RCT responded to a call of suspected poaching earlier that day at the National Trust at Charlecote Park near Wellesbourne,.

Four males from Rugby and Leicestershire were detained at the scene. A Volkswagen Golf and three shotguns (pictured) were seized along with a large amount of ammunition and trapping equipment.

Pony Solen in Bristol

A member of the public responded to a Facebook post reporting a pony stolen in Bristol.

RRCT officers attended the report and with help from the person stabling the pony they used Facebook Video Call to make contact with the owner to establish the identity of the pony



Dec 2019 - Large Scale Fly-tipping.

RCT officers worked closely with the Environment Agency and local Farmers to gather information and target those involved in a fly tipping offences in South Warwickshire.

This followed a lead to Birmingham where the RTC tracked down the vehicle that was using false plates and involved in the offences.

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Search Warrants

The RCT has helped in executing five search warrants in South Warwickshire over the past two weeks, relating to stolen property from Southam. Two cannabis grows and stolen property have been recovered, as well as obtaining crucial intelligence relating to an Organised Crime Group.



The RCT have also overseen several jobs relating to HS2, allegations of disruption to badger sets and bat roosts linked to the project. Working with the local SNTs the team have obtained copies of licences, worked with Natural England and local conservation groups to address the concerns.

Communication

- Warwickshire Rural Watch continues to grow with alerts going out every day, including good news stories. The website has had over 80,000 visits to date.
- The Rural Watch social media pages has a growing number of over 4,600 followers.
- The RCT Crime Team has a following of over 8.400 on Facebook.

The work of the RCT is being recognised as best practice in region and the latest force to create a RCT is seeking guidance and advice from Warwickshire. This is impressive for a team only four months old!

Next Steps

The RCT recognise that there is more to do through improving the consistency and breadth of communication with rural communities, partners and stakeholders. Further investment will provide greater capability and capacity to tackle rural crime and provide dedicated experts who understand the specific needs of those communities.

Contacts

- PS Bob Shaw
- PC Andy Timmins
- PC Craig Purcell
- PC Kate Taylor
- PC Andy King
- Rural Crime Officer North - Carol Cotterill
- Rural Crime Officer South - Bob CHURCH

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- Rural Crime Officer South - Baz BAINES.
- www.facebook.com/WarwickshireRuralCrimeTeam/
- www.warwickshireruralwatch.co.uk
- www.warwickshire-horsewatch.co.uk
- Twitter @ruralcrimecops