



ORIGINATOR: CHIEF CONSTABLE

PAPER NO: AP21/48

SUBMITTED TO: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL –
3 SEPTEMBER 2021

SUBJECT: RURAL POLICING ANNUAL REPORT

SUMMARY:

1. This aim of this report is to provide an update in regard to the Constabulary's approach to rural policing. It provides an oversight of tactical and operational achievement during the period, highlighting significant achievements and areas of development.
2. This report demonstrates the Constabulary's progress toward continued delivery of its Rural Policing Strategy, and changes made to better support that delivery.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. The Accountability and Performance Panel is asked to take note of the work undertaken by the Constabulary, as detailed within this annual report.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report covers the period April 2020 through to March 2021 and provides an update aligned to the four key areas of the Rural & Wildlife Policing Strategy; Prevention, Intelligence, Enforcement and Reassurance.
- 1.2 Strategic oversight of rural policing is held by the Western Area Commander. Tactical delivery is the responsibility of the Neighbourhood and Partnership Team (NPT), overseen by the West NPT Inspector. Priorities for the team are set once a quarter, against the force strategy.
- 1.3 There remains no agreed recognised definition for 'rural crime', which impacts on the ability of the force to research data accurately. This remains not only a difficulty for Suffolk Constabulary, but forces nationally. As a rural county, Suffolk Constabulary aligns its force Rural Policing Strategy to the NPCC strategies for Rural Affairs and Wildlife Crime, applying a local context.

2. RURAL POLICING STRUCTURE

- 2.1 The Constabulary has a dedicated resource for rural policing within the NPT, consisting of three PCs, supervised by the West NPT Sergeant (who is responsible for rural, wildlife & heritage crime). Their purpose is to coordinate activity against the Rural Policing Strategy, deliver training and support operational delivery. The team will undertake specialist investigations as required, but generally support the investigations of other departments as subject matter experts (SMEs).
- 2.2 Delivery of rural policing by the NPT is enhanced through the support of one civilian volunteer and one dedicated special constable and 24 horseback volunteers.
- 2.3 Rural policing is the responsibility of all frontline officers, supported by the aforementioned dedicated resourcing. Officers are provided tailored training according to force priorities and demands to increase officer competence and improve public confidence. During this period a greater focus was placed on increasing operational knowledge through training and delivery, coordinated by the NPT.
- 2.4 The NPT set three monthly priorities for rural policing, delivered through the rural policing officers. These priorities coordinate their activity against the force strategy and support operational objectives.
- 2.5 The rural policing officers within NPT coordinate the forces response to hare coursing, deer poaching and GPS thefts in conjunction with other departments.
- 2.6 Rural policing within NPT at the last report it had been agreed to rename them Rural & Wildlife Officers (RWOs) to place greater emphasis on the breadth of their remit and highlight their support as a tactical rather than investigative resource. This will support a greater drive in countywide frontline delivery and align the force with regional and national counterparts. This has assisted with the understanding of the remit covered by these officers by front line officers and partners.

3. OVERSIGHT

- 3.1 The Rural Policing Strategy breaks delivery down to four key areas; Prevention; Intelligence; Enforcement; and Reassurance.
- 3.2 These four areas are supported by a tactical delivery plan which coordinates and directs the activity of the rural policing officers within the NPT. This plan is managed by the West NPT Inspector, with delivery coordinated by the West NPT Sergeant (rural & Wildlife policing).
- 3.3 The West NPT Inspector provides a quarterly update to the Western Area Commander regarding delivery against the Rural Policing Strategy, emerging trends and priorities for the forthcoming period. Area taskings meetings are held on a monthly basis and attended by the respective area NPT Inspector, during these meetings any operational activity requiring support, direction or trends connected to rural policing are fed back to the West NPT for delivery by the appropriate resource.
- 3.4 The West NPT Sergeant for rural & wildlife policing is responsible for day to day delivery against the strategy and reports the West NPT Inspector on a monthly basis to ensure regular oversight.
- 3.5 Delivery against the strategy is measured through force performance measures, public confidence, operational activity and the rural policing delivery plan. Performance and public confidence are managed on a force wide and area basis through separate processes. These will tend to identify area of concerns in which rural policing plays a factor.
- 3.6 The Constabulary represented by a chief officer and the NPT hold regular meetings with external partners and stakeholders to take account of its delivery against rural policing. These include, but are not limited to, the National Farmers Union (NFU) and Country Landowners and Business Association (CLA).

4. DELIVERY

Prevention

- 4.1 During this period the NPT Sergeant for rural & wildlife policing has reviewed and redesigned delivery of force training in line with known best practice. The training has been separated into two strands; post foundation training (for new officers); and internal training for all front-line staff. The training focuses on core priority offences to ensure officers have underpinning knowledge to support better response and service at the first point of contact.
- 4.2 Training priorities for this period were Hare Coursing and livestock worrying. Within this period, they have trained 5 cohorts of student officers as well as 4 sessions for the Command and Control Team.
- 4.3 A rural & wildlife policing team internal website has been developed for operational teams. This highlights the technical expertise, equipment, resources and agencies available to support operational activity across the force. This package was introduced in response to a perceived lack of awareness in regards to the what services the dedicated resources could provide. The training has seen a positive response and an increase in requests for operational support.
- 4.4 A large amount of prevention work was done online during this period due the pandemic, but the following activities were also still achieved.

- 5 days of action at Kings Forest – In response to the use of motorcycles misuse of the byways which resulted in 12 bike seizures, 1 arrest and a stolen motorcycle recovered.
- Livestock thefts and worrying awareness – in response to farmers suffering and increase in sheep thefts and livestock worrying. This was reinforced by local publicity to educate the local community and reduce instances.
- Night time prevention patrols in deer poaching hot spots, supported by partners and Safer Neighbourhood Teams.
- Supporting the national initiative Op Owl (raptor persecution) to prevent trapping and the killing of birds of prey.
- Public awareness raising in relation to the increasing Dog thefts that took place during this period. Supported by other forces offering crime prevention advice.
- Prevention work conducted with our stakeholder including National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Police Service (NAVCIS) & National farmers union (NFU) to reduce theft of agricultural GPS kits.
- Supporting the PCC, Country Land Association (CLA) and NFU to promote Op Galileo; Hare Coursing-Press coverage showing a crushed car to promote the issues of this crime.
- Joint patrols with National Trust staff at sites of Special scientific interest (SSSI).

4.5 Suffolk Constabulary have also secured a display trailer, which once refurbished will be used to raise awareness at events, increase our presence within rural communities, and attend educational settings to raise awareness amongst children and young people within schools. Funding to complete refurbishment is currently being sought.

Intelligence

4.6 The Rural & Wildlife Policing Officers shared the Norfolk Constabulary Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) 'hot-lists' which were used to target vehicles potentially used by criminals connected to rural and wildlife offences. This list is no longer available or being complied. Work is ongoing within the NPT to create its own 'hotlist' to continue the support for a better response to intelligence, ensuring access by all ANPR vehicles within the force. The R & W policing officers have access to ANPR technology within their patrol vehicles to support targeted activity. These lists can be used both proactively and passively.

4.7 The NPT Sergeant for Rural & Wildlife policing represents the Constabulary at the Regional Wildlife Enforcers Meeting on a quarterly basis, which is attended by regional police forces and partners (such as the RSPCA and CPS). These meetings facilitate the exchanging of intelligence, investigations, crime groups and individuals, allowing for a coordinated and cross border response and taskings for intelligence.

4.8 The NPT act as a point of contact for regional force contacts, supporting immediate and reactive intelligence sharing between front line officers. This supports cross border investigation and initiatives.

4.9 During this period the NPT increased the representation and reporting of activity into the area and force tasking process, ensuring greater awareness of activity and supporting intelligence requirements in response to commission operations. This includes identifying intelligence needs in response to crime trends and raising taskings on briefing systems.

4.10 'Fast SMS' is no longer in use as communication tool, this has been replaced by "TWITTER".

Enforcement

4.11 The period of this report has seen a number of enforcement initiatives and significant operational activity, some of which has been a first for the force. An overview of key enforcement is covered below.

4.12 As a direct result of Rural & Wildlife policing, two adults were prosecuted for a series of livestock worrying and destruction. Both were convicted seeing one imprisoned.

4.13 During this period the Rural & Wildlife Policing Team within the NPT secured a criminal conviction in relation to destruction of a bird's nest.

4.14 The rural policing officers within NPT now have access to a drone in support of policing operations and are all accredited pilots. The drone was not delivered until later in this period, but saw early successes including the detention of four males for hare coursing after being located by the drone. Future drone resource is now currently under review by the Suffolk Drone Board, and an expansion of this capacity is anticipated.

4.15 The Rural Policing Team has undertaken several specialist investigations during this period, of particular note; Three arrested for theft of sheep, this is still pending court result. One person receiving a court summons for poisoning a bird of prey. An investigation into the setting of illegal snares saw another court summons.

4.16 A coordinated local, approach with Rural & Wildlife officers and the SNT has resulted in three males due to face trial for Deer poaching.

- National Rural Crime Week of Action – targeting trade of illegal scrap, deer poaching, rural isolation, hare coursing and road safety. This was supported by partners and protective services.
- Continue to support national days of action against hare coursing, targeting key locations and offenders across the region.
- Overnight operations targeting deer poaching.
- Deployment of tactics to combat agricultural vehicle and equipment theft, supported by key partners.
- Targeted days of action alongside the environment agency to tackle out of season fishing and poaching.
- Overnight operations took place to develop intelligence and provide reassurance to local sheep farmers who had been victims of sheep rustling.
- Targeted overnight operations took place to disrupt and deter night hawking.
- Collaborative days of action with Norfolk Constabulary targeting motorcycle anti-social behaviour within forestry areas.

Reassurance

4.17 Reassurance underpinned by the areas of prevention and enforcement but enhanced through visibility and engagement. The NPT utilise digital media, traditional media, community links and physical contact to provide engagement and visibility.

4.18 The NPT has relaunched and refocussed its online social media presence through twitter. It has rebranded the rural crime twitter account 'Rural, Wildlife & Heritage Policing', to better reflect the breadth of work the team undertakes and highlight the importance of wildlife policing.

4.19 The rural policing officers undertake several regular engagements in support of prevention and reassurance. These include:

- Regular contributions to the BBC Radio Suffolk Breakfast Show throughout the year, including monthly Rural Crime Beat broadcasts on the Saturday breakfast show which unfortunately no longer takes place, but we do plan to replace with Podcasts in future. These highlight local issues and offer advice.
- Regular feature within the East Anglian Daily Press regarding rural and wildlife matters continues.
- Radio, Press and TV support to Corporate Communications in response to media requests, operational activity and national campaigns. This included supporting a feature programme on poaching and hare coursing for ITV, which was broadcast in 2021 and positive comment were received by public.

4.20 The NPT Rural & Wildlife Policing Officers continue to encourage members of the public, businesses and partners to join force messaging systems during engagements.

4.21 Rural & wildlife policing officers have represented the Constabulary at a number of public and partner meetings this year including; 2 meetings with the National Farmer Union (NFU), Country Landowners Association (CLA) and other stakeholders; four regional wildlife enforcement meetings; four regional rural crime meetings. The team continues to support the nation Operation Owl campaign in raising awareness of raptor persecution.

4.22 Rural & Wildlife Policing Officers have further embedded links with neighbourhood teams and the Contact and Control Room to identify opportunities where follow-up visits with victims are required to provide enhanced support or specialist advice. This includes a daily review of incidents over the previous 24hr period, to identify repeat victims, specialist investigations and crime trends.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Constabulary drone capability is currently under review. Any expansion of drone capability in regard to rural policing will incur training and equipment costs. The cost of training is currently able to be met through existing budgets, but any expansion of capability will require additional funding. The current drone is extremely capable and well specified, but additional flexibility in the form of a smaller asset is being considered for rapid response situations. It is likely that such an asset will cost between £2000 - £3000, albeit this will be significantly reduced if we procure existing assets from another force.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

- 6.1 The withdrawal of the 'Fast SMS' service by Norfolk Constabulary means that Suffolk no longer has the option of immediate communication with key community stakeholders and will likely impact on intelligence and information sharing. Suffolk are currently utilising other options such as Twitter and will assess the impact of the change on operational delivery. If negative impact is noted, alternative options will be sought which may have cost implications.
- 6.2 During the reporting period the dedicated rural & wildlife policing resource suffered a high level of abstraction due to absence, which impacted on the last three months of the year reducing from two officers to one. However, this has since been resolved and the team are operating at establishment.