



SUFFOLK CONSTABULARY

ORIGINATOR: CHIEF CONSTABLE

PAPER NO: AP25/14

SUBMITTED TO: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL –
7 MARCH 2025

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE RURAL AND WILDLIFE POLICING
TEAM

SUMMARY:

1. Covering the 2024 calendar year, this report provides an update on the performance of the Rural and Wildlife Policing Team, aligned to the four key areas identified by the Rural and Wildlife Policing Strategy 2023 - 2025; Prepare, Prevent, Protect and Pursue.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) is asked to consider the progress made by the Constabulary and raise issues with the Chief Constable as appropriate to the PCC's role in holding the Chief Constable to account.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This reporting period covers the 2024 calendar year. Updates are provided against the four key areas outlined within the Rural and Wildlife Policing Strategy 2023-2025: Prepare, Prevent, Protect and Pursue.
- 1.2. This paper underlines the commitment of the Rural and Wildlife Policing Team (RAWPT) in protecting our victims by maximising investigative opportunities to get the right outcomes, using a problem-solving approach in resolving longer term issues, working in partnership on areas of most concern and building trust and confidence through visibility, engagement and providing feedback on positive outcomes. These objectives also meet the needs of the Force Strategic Plan 2023-2028.
- 1.3. Strategic oversight of rural and wildlife policing is held by the Superintendent of the County Partnerships and Prevention Hub (CPPH). The RAWPT report to and their work is overseen by one of the two CPPH Inspectors who are responsible for the tactical delivery. Priorities for the team are set against the Constabulary strategy and reviewed and agreed monthly through the Neighbourhood Policing Board (NHP).
- 1.4. Rural crime covers a broad range of themes, carrying across all crime types. Suffolk Constabulary aligns its Rural Policing Strategy to the NPCC strategies for Rural and Wildlife Crime 2022-2025, applying a local context.
- 1.5. This paper supports the related commitment in the Police and Crime Plan that the Constabulary will tackle rural and wildlife crime.

2. RURAL POLICING STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

- 2.1. The Suffolk Constabulary RAWPT comprises of a dedicated Sergeant and three Police Constables.
- 2.2. The purpose of RAWPT is to -
 - Coordinate activity aligned to the Rural and Wildlife Policing Strategy; using evidence and intelligence to evolve our responses to rural communities.
 - Develop the skills of the County Policing Command (CPC) officers, staff and volunteers to enhance their delivery against the Rural and Wildlife Policing Strategy.
 - Provide training and awareness inputs to partners, stakeholders and relevant authorities to increase their knowledge of rural and wildlife matters and heighten awareness of criminality.
 - Engage and respond to rural communities to understand what matters to them and identify emerging concerns.
 - Adopt problem-solving approaches to recurring issues and use a harm-based approach in their responses.
 - Work with partners, stakeholders and other agencies to gather intelligence, tackle issues and support victims of crime.
 - Improve criminal justice outcomes by targeting criminality that causes the most harm to rural communities.
 - Monitor Regional and National reporting to identify and share best practice.
 - Protect and preserve wildlife and rural assets.

- Provide tactical and advisory support to operational delivery, providing advice to front line officers with legislation and wildlife crime compliance.
- Conduct investigations, making good use of preventative measures and work closely with neighbouring forces to improve understanding of cross-border criminality.

2.3. The Rural and Wildlife Policing Strategy 2023-2025 breaks delivery down into four key areas; Prepare, Prevent, Protect and Pursue.

2.4. These four areas are supported by a working strategy held by the County Policing Commander and a tactical delivery plan which coordinates and directs the activity of the rural policing officers within the CPPH. This plan is managed by the designated CPPH Inspector, with delivery coordinated by the Rural and Wildlife Policing Team Sergeant.

2.5. The Rural and Wildlife Sergeant is responsible for day-to-day delivery against the strategy and reports to their CPPH Inspector on a weekly basis to ensure regular oversight. The CPPH Inspector provides a monthly update to the CPPH Superintendent regarding delivery against the Rural and Wildlife Policing Strategy. Updates are given around team performance, emerging trends, and priorities for the forthcoming period. These priorities are represented at the NHP Board by the CPPH Superintendent for discussion with other Area Commanders.

2.6. The County Policing Command (CPC) NHP Board sets priorities, allocates resourcing and agrees force-wide co-ordination for all strands across Neighbourhood Policing including Rural and Wildlife crime.

2.7. The CPPH Inspector reviews content and emerging concerns ahead of each monthly tasking meeting, offering support against area priorities relating to rural crime, and feeding back to the RAWPT where operational activity requires support.

2.8. Delivery against the strategy is measured through Constabulary performance measures, public confidence, operational activity, and the rural policing tactical 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.

2.9. The CPPH hold regular meetings with external partners and stakeholders to take account of its delivery against the rural policing strategy. These include, but are not limited to, the National Farmers Union and the Country Land and Business Association.

3. DELIVERY

PREPARE

3.1. We continue to work with communities to ensure people living in rural areas are safe and free from the fear of crime. Effective engagement and keeping communities informed is vital to policing success. Through pro-active visibility and engagement, the RAWPT encourages involvement from communities at engagements and events, seeking their views on how we are performing, gaining an understanding of the key issues and concerns and providing feedback, as well as delivering important

messaging and crime prevention advice which all plays its part in increasing trust and confidence.

- 3.2. The seeking and sharing of Best Practice is a key part of our delivery, sharing intelligence and themes regionally and drawing on national incentives to improve our own capability through targeted activity and local initiatives.
- 3.3. In the past year to provide reassurance and reduce the fear of crime we have carried out the following:
 - Undertaken virtual and physical engagements and attended community based public events, providing key updates to inform on crime and seek information from our community partners. Including:
 - A quarterly feature with the East Anglian Daily Times
 - Radio, press and TV support to Corporate Communications
 - Promotion of police communications systems such as Police Connect.
 - Other pro-active engagement and presentations include:
 - Working alongside the Environment Agency to tackle out of season fishing and poaching.
 - Targeted police operations to disrupt and deter night hawking.
 - Partnership working with statutory partners to tackle illegal dog breeding.
 - Coordination of prevention activity working with rural stakeholders including National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service (NAVCIS) and National Farmers Union (NFU) to reduce theft of agricultural GPS kits.
 - Attended high profile rural and countryside events to provide targeted crime prevention advice to those most affected by rural crime.
 - Rejuvenation of the Volunteers on Horseback scheme.
 - Internal and external engagement to increase awareness following a rise in Livestock worrying offences.

PREVENT

- 3.4. The Rural and Wildlife Policing Team continue to work with internal and external stakeholders, focusing on the early prevention of crime. Officers will use an evidence-based approach and use effective problem solving in developing tactics that support rural communities, particularly those vulnerable to the impact of crime or recurring issues.

An overview of the prevention activities conducted during this reporting period include:

- Delivery of training to all new Contact and Control Room (CCR) operatives to assist them in recognising and understanding rural, wildlife and heritage crime.
- Promoted relevant prevention techniques and informed on enforcement activity to our communities, enhancing our service through visibility and engagement. The RAWPT also utilise digital and traditional media, appearing on local radio and news broadcasts, community links and physical contact to provide enhanced engagement and visibility.

- Hunt training refocussed on understanding hunt related crime, the relationships and differences between Hunt parties, Monitors and Saboteurs.
- Bespoke training to rural Community Policing Teams (CPT) to embed an understanding that isolated rural communities are vulnerable to crime and minor crime can have a greater impact in smaller communities, this includes crimes such as Hare Coursing, Livestock worrying and poaching etc.
- Continued engagement with those landowners who allow hunts to use their land. Setting out expectations and helping them to understand liabilities related to unlawful hunt activity.
- RAWPT have maintained their strong relationship with Suffolk Wildlife Trust, promoting their work and supporting the enforcement of their rules when on their land.
- RAWPT maintain a regional quarterly meeting with law enforcement partners. This provides a platform for understanding best regional practice, emerging threats and ensures a consistent approach to policing of rural communities across the home counties.
- Continued partnerships with Suffolk County Council and events planning units have been used to ensure the safety of all where rural activities may put public and/or road safety at risk.
- RAWPT have instigated the national multi-force approach to preventing livestock worrying offences. Known as “Operation Recall”, significant media coverage, increased signage and further education to veterinary workers and dog day care workers has increased understanding and awareness of these crimes.
- In response to heritage crime at our rural churches, RAWPT working with Design Out Crime Officers and Corporate Communications have supported the Diocese of Suffolk to prevent the likelihood of repeat victimisation.
- Delivery of Operation Walrus, a multi-county effort to tackle and raise awareness of GPS unit theft from agricultural vehicles. RAWPT now have a database of all farmers using these units and can contact them earlier to raise awareness of theft in nearby counties.

PROTECT

3.5. We listen to our rural communities, giving them a voice and act, where appropriate to increase their personal and/or land safety and protect their homes and businesses from crime.

3.6. RAWPT takes a harm centred approach to tackling rural crime, this allows them to focus their limited resources in the areas that have the greatest impact in preventing and deterring crime. Examples of how we have done this during the reporting period include:

- The RAWPT Sergeant shares information, intelligence, crime trends and cross border criminality with various partners and enforcement agencies through the Regional Wildlife Enforcers meeting. Utilising multi agency information allows RAWPT to set local priorities that protect rural communities from the highest harm offending.
- RAWPT lead on heritage crime and provide subject matter expert advice to strategic leaders and practitioners to ensure crime prevention and effective investigation is completed for sacred heritage sites and ancient monuments.

- RAWPT continue their work with Historic England to develop knowledge and intelligence on those involved with causing harm to our heritage sites.
- RAWPT also lead on prevention and detection of crime linked to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). RAWPT work jointly with partners such as the National Trust, Forestry Commission, RSPB, Suffolk wildlife trust and Local Authorities to ensure these crime types are correctly recorded and investigated to the same standards as other crimes.
- RAWPT continue to build relationships with non-statutory community groups such as Suffolk Action for Wildlife. This improves intelligence opportunities and better confidence in policing of our rural communities.
- RAWPT continue to work in partnership with the National Rural Crime Unit, their National Construction and Agricultural Theft Team (NCAAT) and with neighbouring forces, to identify Organised Crime Group (OCG) activity and cross border crime.
- Suffolk RAWPT provide representation at the UK Tasking and Co-ordinating Group (UKTCG) for Wildlife Crime meetings.
- Joint patrols are undertaken seasonally with the Environment Agency to support their work in tackling fish poaching.

PURSUE

3.7 Enforcement activity is focussed on the areas that create the highest threat, risk and harm to our communities. Working closely with the CPT's to support their understanding of vulnerabilities associated to rural and heritage crime, and to raise awareness of the communities that carry the highest risk of rural vulnerability. Examples of how the Team have implemented or influenced enforcement action in the reporting period include:

- The Rural and Wildlife Policing Team intranet pages highlight the technical expertise, equipment, resources, and agencies available to support operational activity. Local teams can liaise with a WCO Officer and decide who is best placed to lead an investigation. In the case of complex investigations, the RAWPT would consult with rural and wildlife specialists within the Crown Prosecution Service to enable pursuit of the best evidence to support priority cases.
- In response to a series of high value traditional crime (burglary) in rural settings, RAWPT created a Problem-Solving Plan, liaised with neighbourhood and Criminal Investigation Teams to ensure appropriate oversight and intelligence sharing took place. This sharing of information led to multiple arrests across policing borders and investigations continue.
- This year has seen an increase in investigations related to illegal fox hunting. This has highlighted criminal activity within these communities. Three members of a local hunt are awaiting trial at Ipswich Crown Court and other investigations continue.

- RAWPT use a wide range of power to deal with persistent perpetrators, this has included a successful conviction at court for breach of Community Behaviour Order for a member of a hunt party for reckless quad bike driving.
- Other positive outcomes throughout the year include:
 - Community resolution issued for destruction of Water Vole habitat, new bespoke environment created by the offending party.
 - Various Community resolutions issued for Livestock worrying offences and compensation awarded to the victims.
 - Community Protection Notice Warning (CPNW) letters issued for those believed involved in hare coursing.
 - Impending prosecution forthcoming for Badger set destruction
 - CPNW letter issued for illegal Horse fly grazing on village commons.
 - Seizure of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) items namely big cat and primate skulls from auction houses.
 - A member of the team attended court to liaise directly with the prosecutor regarding a case involving five dead Northern Goshawks and another case where four defendants pleaded guilty to metal detecting on a scheduled monument. In both cases, this was beneficial in ensuring the prosecutor had a good understanding of the complexities of the case. Team member given award by the National Wildlife Unit for quality of investigation for this case.

4. EMERGING THEMES AND DEMAND

- 4.1. There is an increase in reports of criminal activity related to hunts. Minor assaults and public order offences continue to be reported. Concerns regarding public safety at some hunts remain. Recent announcements by the government regarding a total ban on trail hunting have caused a rise in tension between saboteur groups and hunt parties. The hunts have seemingly increased their activity this season and the saboteurs have followed suit, this has led to an increased demand on policing.
- 4.2. Following prevention advice and RAWPT work streams with farmer already mentioned, there were only two reported thefts of GPS in 2024 for our county. This marks a significant reduction in crime and is extremely low compared to neighbouring forces.
- 4.3. The unlawful killing of birds of prey continues to be a concern and remains a National Wildlife Crime Unit priority.
- 4.4. There continues to be an increase in reports of illegal off roading activity causing various damage to byways and private land. Problem solving activity is underway and much of this demand is thought to be a lack of education from those who are unfamiliar with the activity. Engagement and enforcement plans are in place.
- 4.5. There has been a noticeable rise in Livestock worrying offences, RAWPT are actively working with neighbourhood policing colleagues to aid them in better understanding

this crime and to improve the investigative opportunities through golden hour principles.

- 4.6. Hare Coursing has reduced in Suffolk by over 50% compared to previous years. Greater collaboration between seven forces and proactivity surrounding Op Galileo incidents and using the new stronger legislation have all contributed to this reduction.
- 4.7. An increase in rural burglaries has been recognised over the past year, this is linked to organised crime activity and several significant arrests have been made. This has increased demand on RAWPT who have been working hard to keep rural communities engaged and supported, alongside supporting investigative opportunities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. In a previous report, the cost of kennelling of seized dogs was highlighted as an ongoing unpredictable concern. Work on this issue has led to a new supplier of kennelling being identified, new procedures for the seizing of dogs and a new process to recover the costs of kennelling being established with our legal provider. These changes are currently in the implementation stages and being written into policy. Once embedded this will create a more hostile environment for those using dogs to offend in the county and bring Suffolk in line with other forces.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

- 6.1. Limited opportunities within the current education framework to offer new Student Officers any significant rural and wildlife training.
- 6.2. Suffolk defines rural crime as "*any crime or series of crimes that causes significant harm or disruption to our rural communities and those who work within them.*" This is a broad spectrum of crime not limited to wildlife and heritage. This can cause confusing and blur lines with other policing teams.

7. KEY LEGISLATURE AND POLICY CHANGES

- 7.1. The Suffolk Rural and Wildlife Policing Strategy was launched mid-2023 and is aligned to the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) Rural and Wildlife Crime Strategy 2022-2025. A new Rural and Wildlife Strategy is expected imminently at which point the existing Suffolk policy will be re-aligned where required.
- 7.2. As identified in 5.1, the policy referencing seized dogs has changed to provide a better service and greater deterrent, this policy will be finalised in early 2025.

8. CHIEF OFFICER CONCLUSION

- 8.1. The Constabulary continues to benefit from a dedicated team that can now influence across the whole of the local policing operating model and in particular the Community Policing Teams. Local strategies are well aligned to national best practice and there are many tangible benefits demonstrated through the local work described under the '4 P' approach (Prepare, Prevent, Protect, Pursue).