

**ORIGINATOR: CHIEF CONSTABLE**

**PAPER NO: AP20/46**

**SUBMITTED TO: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL –  
4 SEPTEMBER 2020**

**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 deliver 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 2019 through to March 2020 and provides an update aligned to the four key areas of the Rural 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 two PCs, supervised by the West NPT Sergeant (who is responsible for rural 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 nine wildlife crime officers, three rural policing volunteers and the horseback volunteer scheme, of which there are currently 28 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 and hunts in conjunction with other departments.
- 2.6 Rural policing within NPT has historically been represented as the 'Rural Crime Team', and Rural Crime Officers. At the conclusion of this period, 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. An update on this will be included in the next report.

## **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 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 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 sperate 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 and Countryside Leaders Alliance.

#### **4. DELIVERY**

##### **Prevention**

- 4.1 During this period the NPT Sergeant for rural 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 first responder training. 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 Hunts. Within this period, 14 frontline teams were trained across the force and eight post-foundation new officer intakes. Training has also been developed for the Command and Control Room (CCR) and is awaiting delivery.
- 4.3 A rural policing officer awareness package has been developed for operational teams. This packaged 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 During this period the Constabulary began the roll out of 4x4 vehicles to each of the 9 local policing commands, which will conclude in 2020. To support increased visibility of police presence within rural and isolated locations, these vehicles have been designated as 'Rural Patrol' vehicles and marked accordingly. This is intended to increase visibility of policing within rural locations and act as an additional deterrent to offenders.
- 4.5 A number of key initiatives and activities were undertaken to support prevention. These included:

- Hare coursing awareness days, during which over 100 hardwearing signs were distributed within hot spot locations to increase reporting and deter offenders.
  - Livestock worrying awareness – in response to farmers suffering livestock worrying issues, the team produced bespoke corrugated plastic advisory notices for placement in high traffic vulnerable areas. This was reinforced by local publicity to educate the local community and reduce instances.
  - Reassurance and prevention patrols in deer poaching hot spots, supported by partners and Safer Neighbourhood Teams.
  - Raising awareness of rural isolation, supporting national domestic abuse campaigns by engaging with communities and highlighting the increased risks posed within rural settings, engaging with businesses, leaders and partners to distribute information and encourage reporting.
  - Early engagement with hunt monitors and participants to offer and provide advice and guidance as necessary to reduce the likelihood of offences occurring.
  - Tailored inputs to four young farmers meetings throughout the year and bespoke village events in hot-spot areas, supported by safer neighbourhood teams
  - Police representation at three barn meetings throughout the year, with an increased focus on better organisation for future meetings (to improve attendance and engagement).
  - Road safety events, with a focus on education rather than prosecution. Raising awareness of the increased risks rural roads can present.
- 4.6 Suffolk Constabulary secured a display trailer during this period, containing a number of indigenous and exotic specimens from the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime. The trailer needs a minor refurbishment, but will be used to raise awareness at events and increase our presence within educational establishments, raise awareness amongst children and young people within schools.

### **Intelligence**

- 4.7 The rural policing officers maintain Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) ‘hot-lists’ which target vehicles used by criminality connected to rural and wildlife offences. These lists support a better response to intelligence, ensuring access by all ANPR vehicles within the force. The rural policing officers have access to ANPR technology within their patrol vehicles to support targeted activity. These lists can be used both proactively and passively.
- 4.8 The NPT Sergeant for rural 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.
- 4.9 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 boarder investigation and initiatives.
- 4.10 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.

- 4.11 Through the use of 'Fast SMS' the rural policing officers are able to supply a direct route for intelligence from the rural community into the team. Intelligence gathered is shared through existing protocols but also directly with the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCUC), Regional Partners and the National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Police Service (NaVCIS).
- 4.12 There are currently 319 subscriptions to the 'Fast SMS' service. The service is split into 4 areas; East, West, South and Hare Coursing. Users may subscribe to more than one area, so have more than one subscription. This system is coordinated by Norfolk Constabulary on behalf of both forces, who recently cancelled their subscription. The NPT are currently considering replacement options.

### **Enforcement**

- 4.13 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.
- 4.14 During this period the rural policing team within the NPT secured the first successful prosecution for a hunt in Suffolk, following appeal. This prosecution has been attributed as contributing to the reduction of hunt related public order and anti-social behaviour for the winter period, in addition to a change in approach by the Constabulary.
- 4.15 For the 2019/20 hunt season, the Constabulary introduced a new standing operational order in response to reported disorder or anti-social behaviour at any organised hunt and a change in the allocation of resourcing, which saw officers allocated in a respond rather than prevent function. This saw a significant reduction in the calls for service by hunt organisers and monitoring groups. The new process incurred a nil planned overtime cost and a total of £292.68, against a cost of £11,659 for the 2018/2019 season.
- 4.16 The rural policing officers within NPT now have access to a drone in support of policing operation 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. The drone capability continues to be expanded and review, this includes the addition of a dedicated support vehicle for 2020 and consideration for a rapid response option, though a smaller drone resource.
- 4.17 The Rural Policing Team has undertaken a number of specialist investigations during this period, of particular note were investigations into serious badger related offences (the damaging of setts) and the illegal trading of ivory (working with the UK Border Agency), both of which saw the identification and sanction of the offenders. This drew national recognition and Sergeant Brian Calver (NPT Sergeant for Rural Policing) received the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Wildlife Enforcer of the Year award.
- 4.18 Hare coursing continues to be a challenge to prosecute, due to evidential difficulties. However, in this period the team secured and supported a number of positive sanctions. Of note are; a conviction secured for priority offender who had come to police attention a number of times, resulting in a substantial fine and 12 month driving ban; and the arrest of an individual sought for a number of burglaries (across the region) during a scrap metal day of action.
- 4.19 A number of coordinated, local, regional and nation initiatives have been instigated and supported by the Constabulary during this period, which included:

- 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.
- Supporting two national days of action against hare coursing, targeting key locations and offenders across the region.
- Two overnight operations targeting deer poaching.
- Deployment of covert and trackable assets relating to agricultural vehicle and equipment theft, supported by key partners.
- Collaborative days of action with Norfolk Constabulary targeting motorcycle anti-social behaviour within forestry areas.

### **Reassurance**

- 4.20 Reassurance is 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.
- 4.21 The NPT has relaunched and refocused its online social media presence through twitter. It has rebranded the rural crime twitter account ‘Rural & Wildlife Policing’, to better reflect the breadth of work the team undertakes and highlight the importance of wildlife policing. This compliments the approach of our regional counter parts. Since rebranding, the account has seen an increase in interactions month on month and is utilised on a regular basis for appeals, good news stories and information sharing.
- 4.22 Key county engagements for this period included; The Suffolk Show; The South Suffolk Show; and Framlingham Country Fair. All of which had a significant footfall.
- 4.23 The rural policing officers undertake a number of 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. These highlight local issues and offer advice.
  - Monthly feature throughout the year in the Suffolk Magazine to raise awareness of rural and wildlife crime, offer advice and signpost to relevant organisation. These are tailored to seasonal trends and force priorities.
  - Regular feature within the East Anglian Daily Press regarding rural and wildlife matters.
  - 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, to be broadcast in 2020.
- 4.24 The NPT rural policing officers continue to encourage members of the public, businesses and partners to join force messaging systems during engagements.
- 4.25 Rural policing officers have represented the Constabulary at a number of public and partner meetings this year including; 5 meetings with the National Farmer Union (NFU), Country Landowners Association (CLA) and other stakeholders; 2 meetings with key deer groups; four young farmer meetings; national hare coursing meeting; heritage crime meetings; two

regional wildlife enforcement meetings; two regional rural crime meetings and undertaken village 'roadshows' as a result of crime trends. The team continues to support the national Operation Owl campaign in raising awareness of raptor persecution.

- 4.26 Rural policing officers have further embedded links with neighbourhood teams and the CCR 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. It is hoped that the cost of this will be offset against the significant savings made during the hunt season.

## **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. Norfolk are considering alternatives, but if one is not identified this will directly impact on existing operational delivery. Suffolk can consider procurement of the system directly, but this will come at an increased cost.
- 6.2 During the reporting period the dedicated rural 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.