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**SUBMITTED TO: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL –
18 MARCH 2022**

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

SUMMARY:

1. This report covers the period April 2021 to March 2022 and provides an update aligned to the four key areas of the Rural and Wildlife Policing Strategy 2020-2022; Prevention, Intelligence, Enforcement and Reassurance.

RECOMMENDATION:

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

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report covers the period April 2021 to March 2022 and provides an update aligned to the four key areas of the Rural and Wildlife Policing Strategy 2020-2022: 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 against the Constabulary strategy and reviewed and agreed monthly through the Neighbourhood Policing Board chaired by the head of the County Policing Command.
- 1.3 There remains no agreed recognised definition for 'rural crime', which impacts on the ability of the Constabulary to research data accurately. This remains not only a difficulty for Suffolk Constabulary but forces nationally. As a rural county, Suffolk Constabulary aligns its Rural Policing Strategy to the NPCC strategies for Rural Affairs and Wildlife Crime, applying a local context.

2. RURAL POLICING STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

- 2.1 Suffolk Constabulary Rural, Wildlife and Heritage Team comprises of a dedicated Sergeant and three Police Constables, who are supported by two dedicated Special Constables, with a third currently in training set to join the full-time team later this year 2022, and a civilian volunteer.
- 2.2 The Rural Team sits within the wider team of the Neighbourhood Partnership Team (NPT). Its 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) as rural policing is the responsibility of all frontline officers.
- 2.3 The Rural and Wildlife Policing Strategy 2020-2022 breaks delivery down to four key areas; Prevention; Intelligence; Enforcement; and Reassurance.
- 2.4 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 Rural and Wildlife Sergeant.
- 2.5 The Rural and Wildlife Sergeant is responsible for day-to-day delivery against the strategy and reports to the West NPT Inspector on a weekly basis to ensure regular oversight.
- 2.6 The West NPT Inspector provides a monthly update to the Western Area Commander regarding delivery against the Rural Policing Strategy, emerging trends and priorities for the forthcoming period, who in turn takes this to the CPC Neighbourhood Policing Board for discussion with the head of CPC as well as other area Commanders.
- 2.7 The County Policing Command (CPC) Neighbourhood Policing Board sets priorities, allocates resourcing and agrees force wide co-ordination for all strands across Neighbourhood Policing including Rural and Wildlife.
- 2.8 Area taskings meetings are held monthly 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 resources.

- 2.9 Delivery against the strategy is measured through constabulary 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.
- 2.10 The Constabulary is 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 Country Land and Business Association.

3. DELIVERY

Prevention

- 3.1 Within this reporting period Suffolk Rural, Wildlife and Heritage policing have reviewed and redesigned 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 including Contact and Control Room (CCR) 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.
- 3.2 Training priorities for this period were Hare and Deer Coursing, Livestock worrying and heritage thefts.
- 3.3 A Rural, Wildlife and Heritage Team internal website has been developed for operational teams. This raises the awareness of offences that fall within this category and provides officers with a toolkit of options and advice around prevention and enforcement.
- 3.4 Bespoke crime prevention is always offered to victims of crime this includes requests that arrive from local groups and residents.
- 3.5 Identified trends from other counties, which may affect rural communities in Suffolk, are raised for awareness to ensure communities and businesses can prevent themselves from becoming victims of crime.
- 3.6 Plastic warning signs regarding specific rural crimes have been designed and made available for farmers, with a view to reducing crime and raising awareness for the wider public.

Intelligence

- 3.7 The NPT Sergeant for Rural and 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.
- 3.8 The Rural and Wildlife Sergeant acts as a point of contact for regional force contacts, supporting immediate and reactive intelligence to be shared to front line officers and staff. This supports cross border investigation and initiatives. For example, the Seven Force Collaboration's use of Community Protection Warning Notices, and full Community Protection Notices for Hare Coursing, is supporting a cross border reduction within this crime area.

- 3.9 We have increased the representation and reporting of activity into the area and force tasking process, ensuring greater awareness of activities and supporting intelligence requirements in response to commission operations.
- 3.10 This includes identifying intelligence needs in response to crime trends and raising taskings on briefing systems and area tactical taskings meetings which are held monthly.
- 3.11 The Rural Team are responsible for entering a significant amount of intelligence into our policing systems. The Team is considering how to measure the impact of this intelligence so that data can be included in future reports.

Enforcement

- 3.12 The Team encourage early contact from officers investigating rural offences for advice and signposting to organisations who can support the investigation process.
- 3.13 The Rural, Wildlife and Heritage internal website highlights the technical expertise, equipment, resources and agencies available to support operational activity across the force. The Team can liaise with the officer and decide who is best placed to lead an investigation.
- 3.14 In the case of complex investigations, the team would consult with members the Crown Prosecution Service who specialise in Rural and Wildlife prosecutions.
- 3.15 The period of this report has seen several enforcement initiatives and significant operational activity, some of which has been a first for the force. An overview of key enforcement is covered below.
 - a) As a direct result of rural and wildlife policing, two adults were prosecuted for a series of livestock worrying and destruction. Both were convicted seeing one imprisoned and the other a life ban for owning animals.
 - b) Three arrested for theft of sheep, this is still pending court trial.
 - c) Two males are currently under investigation for Animal Welfare Act offences after they were suspected of hunting with dogs. The dogs were seized, and the matter is ongoing.
 - d) Words of advice issued and encouragement to work with environment agency re otter trapping.
 - e) Out of court disposals used for Bat Roost interference and destruction.
 - f) A suspect taken to court following investigation for poisoning a buzzard. He was convicted for firearms offences and incorrect storage of pesticide.
 - g) Pending prosecution for Dormouse habitat destruction.



Reassurance

- 3.16 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.
- 3.17 The NPT has relaunched and refocused its online social media presence through twitter. It has rebranded the rural crime twitter account 'Rural, Wildlife and Heritage Policing', to better reflect the breadth of work the team undertakes and highlight the importance of wildlife policing.
- 3.18 Suffolk Constabulary has secured a display trailer, which has been refurbished. This is used to raise awareness at public events, increase our presence within rural communities, and attend educational settings to raise awareness amongst children and young people within schools.



3.19 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, covering a wide range of issues effecting rural communities and wildlife.
- A 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, which was broadcast in 2021 and positive comments were received by public.
- The NPT Rural and Wildlife Policing Officers continue to encourage members of the public, businesses and partners to join force messaging systems during engagements.

3.20 Other engagement and presentation include:

- 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.
- Partnership working with RSPCA and local council re the raising issue of illegal dog breeding.
- Joint working internally and with NFU over the ongoing crime of GPS thefts from farm equipment.
- Fly tipping initiative with local councils to highlight the dangers to the wider public including correct disposal methods.
- Public information sharing re the ongoing thefts of post boxes including contents, across Suffolk working alongside the Royal Mail.
- 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.
- 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 (NAVVIS) and National Farmers Union (NFU) to reduce theft of agricultural GPS kits.
- Joint patrols with National Trust staff at Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

4. EMERGING THEMES AND DEMAND

4.1 Dog thefts have reduced; however, we have seen an increase in unlicensed breeding. The team are working with local councils and other appropriate services to look at ways to tackle and reduce this increase.

4.2 Theft of cable has increased, effecting rural communities on a wide scale. With increased prices, this is likely to continue/increase.

4.3 Interest in heritage items has fuelled thefts in other counties, including statues and stone slabs. More recently within Suffolk we have seen this rise with the theft of Post Office boxes.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The financial cost of a seized dog can run into thousands of pounds for kennelling and vet fees, and this impedes our ability to effectively tackle crime groups that illegally use dogs as tools. The dogs can be in our care for months whilst offenders are waiting for trial.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

6.1 In this reporting period the team have not had access to drones. An internal team is reviewing drone capability across the organisation not just the Rural, Wildlife and Heritage, so this issue can be addressed.

6.2 Funding options are being explored to equip the team with thermal scopes. Over this period a scope was used to catch a male who was otter trapping, they also assisted in directing neighbourhood policing teams to tactical locations in order to detain males who were deer poaching.

7. KEY LEGISLATURE AND POLICY CHANGES

7.1 New legislation expected as part of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, is likely to introduce new offences in relation to Hare Coursing, as well as increased sentencing powers which will be available to magistrates.