

ORIGINATOR: CHIEF CONSTABLE

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**SUBMITTED TO: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL –
17 MARCH 2023**

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

SUMMARY:

1. Covering the period from April 2022 to March 2023, 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 2020 - 2022; Prevention, Intelligence, Enforcement and Reassurance.

RECOMMENDATION:

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

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This reporting period covers April 2022 to March 2023. Updates are provided against the four key areas outlined within the Rural and Wildlife Policing Strategy 2020-2022: Prevention, Intelligence, Enforcement and Reassurance.
- 1.2. This paper underlines the commitment of the Rural and Wildlife Policing Team (RAWPT) in protecting our victims, taking an evidenced based approach to resolving longer term issues and working in partnership with others to build confidence in rural policing. These objectives meet the needs of the Force Strategic Plan 2020-2023.
- 1.3. 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 (CPC).
- 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 Affairs and Wildlife Crime, applying a local context.
- 1.5. This paper supports the related commitment in the Police and 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, who are supported by a civilian volunteer.
- 2.2. The purpose of RAWPT is to coordinate activity aligned to the Rural Policing Strategy, deliver training both internally to the wider police family and externally to partners. They are also the tactical support for operational delivery, providing advice to front line officers around legislation as well as taking ownership of crime investigations that cause our rural communities the most harm. The Team is seen as the subject matter expert, so are there to assist in building the knowledge and experience of front-line policing..
- 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. The NPT Inspector attends monthly tasking meetings, offering support against Area priorities relating to rural crime, feeding back to the RAWPT where operational activity requires support.
- 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 NPT 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 Country Land and Business Association.

3. DELIVERY

Prevention

- 3.1. 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 in developing tactics that will support rural communities, particularly those more vulnerable to the impact of crime.
- 3.2. An overview of their activities during this reporting period is shown:
 - Officers have devised a training package that has been provided to all new members of staff in the Contact and Control Room (CCR). All staff now receive updated guidance to support the recording and reporting of rural and wildlife matters. There is also a continuous process of upskilling CCR staff and officers through tactical advice and personal feedback.
 - The training priorities for this period were all centred on hunt related activity, identified as part of the local and national strategy as an area continuing to cause harm in our communities. Having reviewed current hunt procedures, additional training has been provided to front line officers, increasing confidence in our service delivery. Getting our Teams to understand rural crime is key in developing our strength in supporting those in rural isolated areas and vulnerable to crime.
 - Officers have provided advice and guidance to landowners and those who partake in hunting, following several allegations of unlawful hunting. This process has allowed us to make the legislation clear and to ensure compliance with the Hunting Act.
 - The Constabulary has engaged with the Suffolk Wildlife Trust to promote the work they do, and enforce site rules particularly regarding dogs on leads, with a view to raising awareness. This type of engagement had proven popular in supporting other

agencies in promoting tourism and building confidence. The Team publicised the joined up approach through quarterly engagement with the East Anglian Daily Times.

- The Constabulary liaised with regional contacts to explore opportunities for upcoming training inputs regarding badger persecution and investigations. The sharing of information and expertise with other Forces and agencies has helped shape our own response to wildlife crime in general understanding national trends in balance with local needs.
- Work has continued with Suffolk County Council and the Suffolk Police Events Planning Unit to put effective safety planning into the meet and greet part of Boxing Day Hunts. The safety of all road users during these events has been a particular focus for local partners and the public. Asserting clarity around expectations and responsibilities has contributed to maintaining public and road safety moving forward.
- Liaison has continued with gamekeepers and landowners to discuss their ongoing concerns, whilst providing them with crime prevention advice around current crime trends.
- The Team has reviewed its response to livestock worrying and listened to those affected by this crime. As a result, best practice advice has been provided to the Crime Co-ordination Centre (CCC) and Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT) supporting a stronger recording response.
- Liaison has been undertaken with Suffolk Owl Sanctuary with a view to developing an education programme for schools, enabling students to carry out a realistic investigation.
- Crime prevention advice was provided on the run up to Christmas to poultry producers and some farm shops, having identified the increased risk in becoming victims of theft offences, because of poultry shortages, high prices and the cost-of-living crisis.
- The Constabulary has engaged with the Diocese in Suffolk, providing support from Designing Out Crime Officers as well as a visible presence periodically to support the prevention and reduction of heritage crime.
- The Constabulary has liaised with Forestry England, proving crime prevention advice and general support with a focus on reducing the risk of crime and promoting tourism on their sites.
- Engagement has been undertaken with the National Trust, building stronger relationships, and educating them around crime reporting and recording. Identifying active criminality against the National Trust is part of a wider focus on organised crime, and how we can work together to reduce the threat of offences.
- The Constabulary has liaised with the National Wildlife Crime Unit regarding new training modules that are forthcoming, with a view to ensuring all Police Wildlife Crime Officers receive the most up to date training.

- The RAWPT offer bespoke visits to rural residents, farmers and members of the agricultural community who are at a higher risk of crime. The team continues to focus its attention on repeat and vulnerable victims to offer this service.

Intelligence

- 3.3. It is important we listen to what people tell us and act upon it and that we provide relevant information to rural communities to help people take preventative action themselves.
- 3.4. The RAWPT continue to improve the way we use and share information to identify rural crime problems and through assessment of threat, risk and harm determine the option we can use to deter and disrupt criminality.
- 3.5. Examples of how we have done this during the reporting period include:
 - The RAWPT Sergeant represents the Constabulary at the Regional Wildlife Enforcers Meeting on a quarterly basis. This meeting is attended by regional police forces and partners (such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Crown Prosecution Service). These meetings facilitate the exchanging of intelligence, investigations, crime groups and individuals, allowing for a coordinated and cross border response as well as taskings for intelligence locally. The information provided in this forum has helped shape our response to organised rural crime, by utilising national intelligence, assets, and best practice.
 - Immediate and reactive intelligence is shared with the RAWPT. This information is disseminated through our Intelligence Unit to front line officers and staff. This activity supports cross border investigations and initiatives. For example, the Seven Force Collaboration ratified the use of Community Protection Warning Notices, and full Community Protection Notices for Hare Coursing. The process was adopted in Suffolk, its implementation contributing to a reduction in this area.
 - The RAWPT has 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 commissioned operations. This process proved successful in a recent theft series relating to agricultural equipment. RAWPT information assisted the operation's success in identifying suspects and the location of the stolen goods out of force.
 - There has been a renewed focus on liaison and engagement with Suffolk Against Fox Hunting. This relationship has helped develop the intelligence picture around allegations of unlawful hunting of mammals with hound packs. As a result, the improved relationships have aided evidential capture as part of investigations.
 - The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) provided information to the RAWPT that resulted in the seizure of a large wild bird egg collection. This investigation is ongoing, but would not have taken place without the sharing of information.
 - The Team has assisted in the development of intelligence that concerned an emerging series of the theft of agricultural GPS equipment. Working with the National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service (NAVVIS) and neighbouring forces, an International Organised Crime Group has been identified as being responsible for the offences. The

Team continues to support internal and external departments in identifying those involved.

- Intelligence has been developed relating to deer poaching, and advice provided to landowners. Following an evaluation of our policing response to this area, further guidance has been provided to front line officers.
- Liaison has been undertaken with NAVCIS regarding rural crime trends, where property has been in other parts of the country, with a view to developing the intelligence picture surrounding those involved and disposal routes for property. This information is shared with regional contacts to influence policing operations.
- Best practice and intelligence themes are regularly shared with regional Wildlife Crime Officers across rural and wildlife themes. The information is then highlighted in the respective national Priority Delivery Groups for wider dissemination and tasking.
- Suffolk RAWPT provide representation at the UK Tasking and Co-ordinating Group (UKTCG) for Wildlife Crime meetings. The focus of this meeting is on the national priorities, and how we adapt our local policing response to address the wider themes. In the past year, this meeting has assisted local development of organised crime and hunt related matters.
- The RAWPT attend national meetings such as the National Wildlife and Rural Crime Conference. Attendance is vital in building relationships, increasing intelligence opportunities and understanding how national trends reflect on local taskings. This information helps shape our response to the strategy allowing officers to focus attention on the key areas using national practices.
- Information sharing with Historic England, with a view to developing the intelligence picture on those involved with causing harm to our heritage sites. This drives local taskings to ensure we can prioritise areas carrying the highest threat of crime.
- Joint patrols were undertaken with the Environment Agency to support their work in tackling fish poaching.

Enforcement

- 3.6. Enforcement activity is focussed on the areas that create the highest threat, risk, and harm to our communities. The RAWPT work closely with neighbourhood policing teams to understand the locations most susceptible to rural related crimes, and those communities that carry the highest risk of rural vulnerability.
- 3.7. Examples of how the Team have implemented or influenced enforcement action in the reporting period are shown below:-
 - The Rural and Wildlife Policing Team internal website now highlights the technical expertise, equipment, resources, and agencies available to support operational activity across the Constabulary. Teams can liaise with an officer and decide who is best placed to lead an investigation. In the case of complex investigations, the team would consult with rural and wildlife specialists within the Crown Prosecution Service, gaining an understanding of the best evidence to support priority cases.

- Stop search powers relevant to rural and wildlife crime are provided to the Optik team to add to the 'forms' package. Combined with additional advice to officers, this tactic provides the front-line resource with the additional support in the delivery of their policing powers for greater effect.
- The RAWPT seized eight dogs from a male in Sudbury following their investigation into animal welfare related offences. The male, known for other high-risk criminality in the area, was sentenced to 12 months in prison and banned from keeping animals for 15 years.
- The Team continues to work closely with local authorities and the Environment Agency to tackle pockets of fly tipping reports and illegal waste processing. Information has been shared, ensuring those responsible are brought to justice.
- There have been several successful outcomes for nighthawking operations. As an example, four males from Norfolk were detained on a national heritage site with metal detectors. This led to a significant investigation, assisted by Historic England and a successful outcome for police and partners. In another incident, three individuals metal detecting on land without permission during the day were issued with community resolutions.
- There have been investigations around several fox death reports linked to hunting leading to interviews under caution for alleged suspects. These investigations are ongoing.
- Following reports of bird of prey crime, the RAWPT supported the RSPB with a large-scale search of land and premises. Working with the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) and Natural England, the RAWPT also assisted bringing enforcement action for illegal pesticide storage.
- Following internal damage to a church, the RAWPT concluded the investigation by identifying the offenders and overseeing reparation works, an outcome supported by the victim.
- Four separate incidents of bat roost destruction were investigated, all of which resulted in community resolutions being issued. The outcome of the community resolutions saw donations being made to a wildlife charity and habitat enhancement.
- A community resolution was issued for an offence of livestock worrying, and this outcome was supported, and desired, by the victim.
- A community resolution was issued for the taking and possession of a wild blackbird.
- An Investigation commenced with Norfolk Constabulary, whereby two search warrants were executed with RSPB and NWCU staff. As a result, an individual was issued with a community resolution for possession of a wild taken peregrine falcon. The bird was rehabilitated by an expert and later released into the wild.
- A community resolution was issued in relation to some netting on buildings which were trapping wild birds in Ipswich.
- A community resolution was issued for theft of fishing rights on a private fishery.

- Advice and support were provided for an investigation which has resulted in two males being charged with theft of carp from a private fishery.

Reassurance

3.8. We continue to work with communities to ensure people living in rural areas can feel safe and be safe. Good two-way communication, local engagement and reassurance all have a role to play in giving communities confidence in the policing service across rural areas.

3.9. As we strive towards providing this reassurance, we have carried out the following:

- Promoted the areas of prevention and enforcement to our communities, enhancing our service through visibility and engagement. The RWPT utilise digital and traditional media, community links and physical contact to provide that engagement and visibility.
- Committed to standardised engagements providing updates, information, and reassurance. These include:
 - Periodic attendance on BBC Radio Suffolk Breakfast Show.
 - A quarterly feature within the East Anglian Daily Times.
 - Radio, Press and TV support to Corporate Communications in response to media requests, operational activity, and national campaigns.
 - The Rural and Wildlife Policing Officers continue to encourage members of the public, businesses, and partners to join force messaging systems as part of wider engagements.
- Other engagement and presentations include:
 - 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.
 - 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 National Farmers Union (NFU) over the ongoing crime of GPS thefts from farm equipment.
 - Public information sharing regarding the ongoing thefts of post boxes including contents, across Suffolk working alongside the Royal Mail. This included taking part in a live interview on Crimewatch UK.

- Livestock thefts and worrying awareness in response to farmers suffering an increase in livestock worrying. This was reinforced by local publicity to educate the local community and reduce instances.
- Prevention work conducted with rural stakeholders including National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service (NAV CIS) and National Farmers Union (NFU) to reduce the theft of agricultural GPS kits.
- Joint patrols with National Trust staff at Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- Attendance at events such as Hadleigh and Suffolk shows where crime prevention advice was provided. This has included town centre engagement events and farmers' markets too.

4. EMERGING THEMES AND DEMAND

- 4.1. There is a small increase in reports of criminal activity related to hunts, with minor assaults and public order offences alleged.
- 4.2. There are sporadic reports of thefts of GPS trackers from farm and agricultural machinery, and these have been highlighted regionally as potentially being part of an Organised Crime Group (OCG).
- 4.3. The unlawful killing of birds of prey continues to be an ongoing issue, and this is a National Wildlife Crime Unit priority.
- 4.4. Work is ongoing with the RSPB and British Association for Shooting to help promote awareness.
- 4.5. There is a significant decrease in hare coursing related offences and intelligence.
- 4.6. There is an ongoing commitment in respect of new staff in the CCR and Student Officers.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. The kennelling of dogs seized as part of criminality continues to cause unpredicted financial demands. With court delays, often perceived short term kennelling periods can result in extended costs. Other forces offer a fostering scheme to bypass kennels, and this is now being explored by the Constabulary.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

- 6.1. Lack of opportunities within the current education framework to offer new Student Officers rural and wildlife training.
- 6.2. No national definition for rural crime, and as such tracking crime trends using internal systems can often be complex.

7. KEY LEGISLATURE AND POLICY CHANGES

- 7.1. The Rural Crime policy is a joint document for Norfolk and Suffolk. The revised version has now been fully updated on the Suffolk side and remains with Norfolk for comment. Anticipated submission date will be mid-March 2023.
- 7.2. The latest Suffolk Rural and Wildlife Policing Strategy has been drafted following the release of the national strategy. This is now under review with the OPCC, with an anticipated completion date of mid-March 2023.
- 7.3. The Wildlife Crime Officer risk assessment is currently under review, expected completion date mid-March 2023.

8. CHIEF OFFICER CONCLUSION

- 8.1. The Constabulary maintains a firm commitment to the effective policing of rural and wildlife crime. The local strategy is being dutifully delivered by the RAWPT, and there are many good examples listed of operational initiatives that are being delivered to bring offenders to justice and prevent crimes being committed.
- 8.2. There are ongoing challenges in understanding some of the impacts and outcomes of the associated work. There remains a lack of national definition of what constitutes such crime, and therefore development of performance understanding is difficult. Localised awareness raising will continue to ensure a good understanding of the relevant issues in the workforce and public knowledge.