

ORIGINATOR: CHIEF CONSTABLE

PAPER NO: AP24 – 15

**SUBMITTED TO: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL –
1 MARCH 2024**

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

SUMMARY:

1. Covering the period from April 2023 to January 2024, 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 April 2023 to January 2024. 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 newly formed 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, who are supported by a civilian volunteer.
- 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.
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 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.
- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 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 also 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 in our ongoing effort to provide reassurance and reduce the fear of crime we have carried out the following:

- 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, community links and physical contact to provide that engagement and visibility.
- Undertaken virtual and physical engagements and attended community based public events, providing key updates, informing on crime and sought for information and intelligence.

These include:

- 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 such as Police Connect.
- Other pro-active engagement and presentations include:
 - Deployment of tactics to combat agricultural vehicle and equipment theft, supported by key partners.
 - Undertaken days of action, working alongside the Environment Agency to tackle out of season fishing and poaching which is a seasonal concern.
 - Targeted overnight operations to disrupt and deter night hawking.
 - Partnership work with the RSPCA and local council over the rising issue of illegal dog breeding.
 - Joint working with internal departments and also with the National Farmers Union (NFU) over the ongoing crime of GPS thefts.
 - Delivered and broadcast information to raise awareness of livestock thefts and worrying offences, in response to farmers suffering an increase in livestock worrying. This was reinforced by local community engagement to educate the local community and reduce the number of reports.
 - The coordination and involvement in prevention activity with rural stakeholders including National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service (NAVVIS) and National Farmers Union (NFU) to reduce theft of agricultural GPS kits.
 - Attendance at events such as Hadleigh and Suffolk Shows where crime prevention advice was provided. This has also included town centre engagement events and farmers' markets too.

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.
- 3.5. An overview of the prevention activities conducted during this reporting period include:
- The team created a training package that is now provided to all new members of staff in the Contact and Control Room (CCR). This includes updated guidance to support the recording and reporting of rural and wildlife matters. RAWPT offer bespoke 1-2-1 or team training to CCR staff and officers and provide ongoing tactical advice and personal feedback.

- Training priorities remain centred on hunt related activity. This is also recognised within the Local and National strategies as an area of risk in terms of harm caused to, and within rural communities. Additional training has been provided to front line officers, increasing confidence in their service delivery in this area by informing them on legislative boundaries and options for preventative activity.
- Ensuring our teams understand rural crime is key in developing our strength in supporting those in rural and isolated areas and vulnerable to crime. As part of the introductory training to the new Operating Model, awareness training was provided to all Community Policing Team (CPT) staff and supervisors that included hare coursing, livestock worrying, poaching, hunts and cruelty to animals.
- Officers have provided advice and guidance to landowners and those who take part in hunting, following several allegations of unlawful hunting. This process enables us to reinforce requirements under the legislation and to ensure ongoing compliance with the Hunting Act.
- RAWPT remain connected to the Suffolk Wildlife Trust to promote the work they do, and when on relevant land governed by the trust, officers enforce site rules such as keeping dogs on leads, with a view to raising awareness. This type of engagement has been positively received by other agencies in promoting tourism and building confidence. The Team publicise the joined-up approach through quarterly engagement with the East Anglian Daily Times.
- Through quarterly meetings the team interact with regional contacts and external agencies with a vested interest in reducing wildlife crime and its impact within rural communities by exploring opportunities for shared training. The sharing of information and expertise with other Forces and agencies supports our own response to wildlife crime by increasing our understanding of regional and national trends and enables us to balance that with local priorities and needs.
- Work continues in partnership 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 contributes to maintaining public and road safety.
- The RAWPT engage with gamekeepers and landowners to discuss their ongoing concerns, whilst providing them with crime prevention advice around current crime trends and identified emerging concerns.
- The Partnership Teams, Design Out Crime Officers and Corporate Communications have provided regular support to the Diocese in Suffolk, undertaking environment visual assessments or follow up visits in response to crime, emerging concerns, and identified location vulnerabilities to prevent and reduce the likelihood of heritage crime.
- Seasonal prevention advice is shared through RAWPT and our neighbourhood teams to Forestry England, providing crime prevention advice and visibility with a focus on reducing the risk of crime and promoting tourism on their sites.

- 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. As a result, the RAWPT have conducted engagements within National Trust boundaries and with their volunteers and employees, building strong relationships to encourage crime reporting and the sharing of intelligence.
- The National Wildlife Crime Unit provides essential Wildlife Crime Officer (WCO) training to our RAWPT officers ensuring they remain operationally competent within their role.
- RAWPT undertake bespoke visits to rural residents, farmers and members of the agricultural community who are at a higher risk of crime, either due to their geographical location or due to an individual vulnerability identified. The team will continue to focus attention on repeat and vulnerable victims.

PROTECT

- 3.6 It is important we listen to what people tell us and act upon it so that we can provide relevant information and safety advice to rural communities. This supports people to take steps that can increase their personal or land safety and protect their home and businesses from crime.
- 3.7 RAWPT continue to improve the way they use and share information to identify rural crime problems and through assessment of threat, risk and harm allows them to determine the option that can be used to deter and disrupt criminality.
- 3.8 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 sharing 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 to protect our communities from harm.
 - RAWPT provide representation and reporting of activity into the Area and Force level tasking process. This ensures greater awareness of activities and the necessary support to the response for commissioned operations and local priorities.
 - RAWPT continue to liaise with Suffolk Action for Wildlife. This relationship has helped develop the intelligence picture around allegations of unlawful hunting of mammals with hound packs. This has resulted in improved relationships through effective information sharing to offer greater protection to those at risk of harm or those areas targeted within the rural community.
 - RAWPT work in partnership with the newly formed 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. The Team continues to support internal and external departments in identifying offenders through continual intelligence building to map offending, and taking pro-active action preventing crime to protect those at risk of relevant offending.

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- 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.
- 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 us develop a more effective response to the strategy, allowing officers to focus attention on the key areas using national practices.
- Information sharing is undertaken with Historic England to develop knowledge and intelligence on those involved with causing harm to our heritage sites. This generates local taskings to ensure we prioritise areas carrying the highest threat of crime.
- Joint patrols are undertaken seasonally with the Environment Agency to support their work in tackling fish poaching.

PURSUE

- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 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.
 - Stop search powers relevant to rural and wildlife crime are provided to the OPTIK team to add to the Forms package which contain additional advice to officers. This option provides front line officers and staff with additional support in the delivery of their policing powers.
 - The Team continues to work closely with local authorities and the Environment Agency to tackle instances of fly tipping reports and illegal waste processing. Information has been shared effectively to ensure those responsible are identified and brought to justice.
 - There have been several investigations related to illegal hunting which have highlighted additional criminal activity, these remain ongoing.
 - Following any reports of bird of prey crime, the RAWPT seek support from the RSPB to secure convictions and to deal with perpetrators.
 - RAWPT work with the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) and Natural England to assist in enforcement action for those who perpetrate illegal pesticide storage.

- A bat roost destruction was investigated, which resulted in a community resolution being issued. The outcome of the community resolution saw a donation 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 by the victim.
- A community resolution was issued for the taking and killing of wild sparrows. The air rifle, pellets and slip were seized, disclaimed and destroyed.
- A community resolution was issued in relation to interfering with an active bird's nest. A donation of £30.00 was made to the Suffolk Wildlife Trust.
- A community resolution was issued for theft of fishing rights on a private fishery.
- A community resolution was issued for removing a closed ring from a dead barn owl and re-using it which is an offence contrary to the COTES Regs 2018.
- A young offender was referred to the Youth Justice Service for kicking a hedgehog.
- The team have also assisted with advice to colleagues around numerous rural and wildlife crime types and have linked in with neighbouring police forces, partner agencies and Non-Government Organisations.
- 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.

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 between members of the hunts, and hunt monitors. As well as criminality there has been increased concern over public safety including obstruction of the highway, civil and aggravated trespass.
- 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 a concern and remains a National Wildlife Crime Unit priority.
- 4.4. Work is ongoing with the RSPB and British Association for Shooting to help promote awareness of legislation and safe practices.
- 4.5. There is a significant decrease in hare coursing related offences and intelligence.
- 4.6. There is an ongoing training commitment in respect of new staff in the CCR and Student Officers.
- 4.7. The Constabulary introduced a new policing model in December 2023, and it expected that improvements in visibility and coverage at vulnerable locations should be seen most

notably within Community Policing Team (CPT) activity. The role of the Rural and Wildlife Policing Team is unchanged, and whilst it is too soon to assess the improvements of the new policing model this will be kept in mind during relevant evaluation stages.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. The kennelling of dogs seized as part of criminality continues to cause unpredictable financial demands. With court delays kennelling costs can mount exponentially. Through benchmarking and regional enquiries, we are aware of other forces offering a fostering scheme to bypass kennels, and this is now being explored by the Constabulary. Since the legislation changed regarding seized dogs used in coursing incidents, police can now claim these costs back from those convicted of such crimes.

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. There is no national definition for rural crime, and as such tracking crime trends using internal systems can often be complex and lengthy.

7. KEY LEGISLATURE AND POLICY CHANGES

- 7.1. The Rural, Wildlife and Heritage Crime policy is a joint document for Norfolk and Suffolk. The revised version was approved in November 2023.
- 7.2. The new Suffolk Rural and Wildlife Policing Strategy was launched mid-2023 and is aligned to the National NPCC Rural and Wildlife Crime Strategy 2022-2025.

8. CHIEF OFFICER CONCLUSION

- 8.1. The Constabulary remains committed to effectively policing rural and wildlife crime issues. The local strategy has been aligned to national expectations and is being delivered against, as described in this report. Dedicated resources remain in place and are supporting the wider policing efforts through dealing with matters requiring specialist knowledge and provide subject matter expertise to colleagues with less experience across county policing.