



## OFFICE OF THE POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR THAMES VALLEY

### Report of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley to the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel meeting on 10 September 2021

#### Rural Crime

##### Introduction

This is a high level briefing providing an outline of key activity being undertaken or planned by TVP in relation to tackling rural crime and supporting our rural communities.

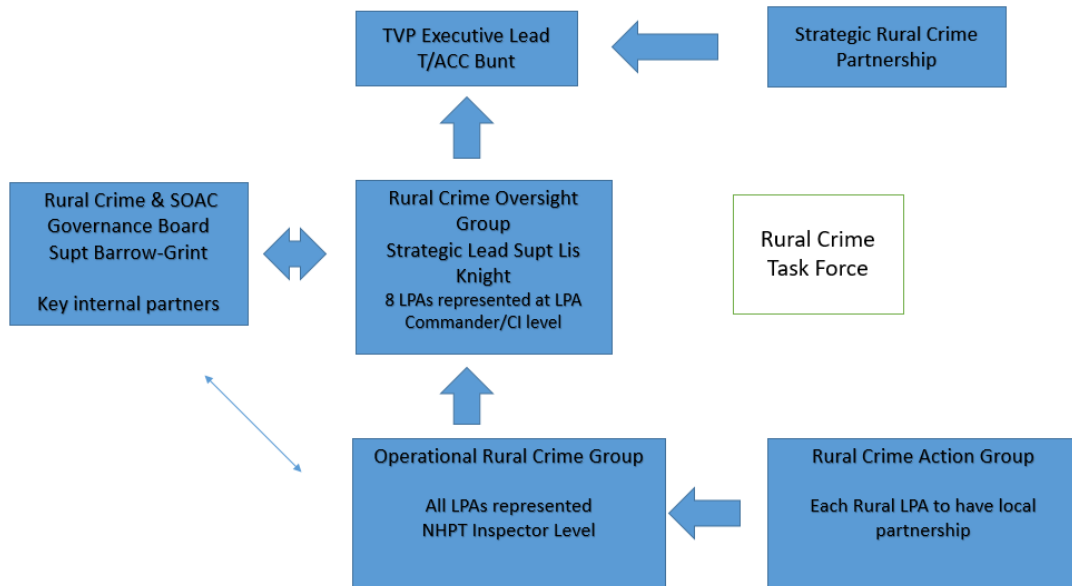
In the last 12 months there has been a significant re-focus on rural crime by the force, endorsed and supported by the Police & Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable. Key highlights include:

- The introduction of a dedicated team of officers to tackle rural crime – the rural crime taskforce. This is a significant investment from the force and clear statement of intent in relation to tackling more serious and organised criminality impacting our rural communities. The uniform team will be supported by a dedicated intelligence officer and analyst. This is a significant investment for the force and will include associated costs of equipment and training (including 4x4 capability, ANPR and drones)
- Revised and enhanced force governance to ensure appropriate strategic, tactical and operational oversight and direction.
- The introduction of a revised rural crime strategy
- The introduction of a revised force definition for rural crime to improve recording, data and analysis
- Rural crime training for our call centre and control room staff
- The introduction of a new rural crime communication strategy. Central to this will be a new rural crime newsletter which has been put together at the request of key rural stakeholders.

ACC Local policing is the chief officer lead for rural crime and chairs the rural crime partnership. The PCC is a key member of this group. The Chief Constable holds the ACC to account through existing force governance structures including CCMT and force performance group.

## Rural crime Governance

### Rural Crime Governance Arrangements



Rural Crime Partnership meeting – Chaired by ACC Bunt

Rural crime strategic oversight group – Chaired by Superintendent Knight

Rural crime operational group – Chaired by Chief Inspector Shaladan

### **Rural crime Partnership meeting Terms of reference**

#### Aims of the Partnership

- Bring together relevant representatives and organisations to provide coordination and strategic leadership in tackling rural crime issues across Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire
- Contribute to reducing rural crime and the fear of rural crime in Thames Valley

#### Role of the Partnership

- To engage with rural communities, enterprises and wider stakeholders to prioritise rural crime issues
- To identify good practice and expertise at local, regional and national level for implementation
- To encourage Partnership members to own specific priority issues, utilising specialist skills to develop plans focussing on prevention, intelligence and enforcement measures
- To influence and develop themes and projects to tackle rural crime issues

## **Rural Crime Task Force**

The rural crime taskforce has been agreed at CCMT level.

Whilst rural crime has been a priority for the force for a number of years, it is often overlooked and under resourced for other more pressing issues. The geography and demographics of TVP and its large urban conurbation and rural mix can mean that force resources are concentrated into the urban areas to meet demand, threat and risk that are associated with the high volume centres of population. Whilst we have some excellent rural Neighbourhood Officers, who are highly valued by the rural community, we often struggle to provide the critical mass of Officers with the appropriate knowledge and understanding of rural crime issues to support rural policing. This means that all too often officers find themselves being reactive rather than proactive, impacting upon both our efficiency and effectiveness in tackling this crime type. It is well known within FISO and Neighbourhood teams that the deficit in rural crime intelligence and significant under reporting combined with inaccuracies around recording, make tackling rural crime offenders and OCGs extremely challenging.

### **Objective of the taskforce**

The Rural Crime Taskforce will provide an exciting opportunity to re-energise and re focus efforts in tackling rural crime. The dedicated team will enhance the operational response to rural crime and support rural neighbourhood teams in their engagement with the community. The revised rural crime strategy and force wide governance providing consistency, focus and partnership working will enable the Task Force to target key rural crime offenders through the development of intelligence by a dedicated intelligence team.

The Task Force will:

- Provide a statement of intent to our rural communities in tackling rural crime issues, building both trust and confidence.
- Provide dedicated, proactive, specialist resource to enhance our operational capability in tackling rural crime
- Provide specialist resources to support rural neighbourhood teams in engaging with their communities thereby increasing the visibility of patrols
- Focus on gathering and developing rural crime intelligence ensuring that the team are targeting and focussing on those who cause the rural community most harm
- Effectively tackle cross border criminality through working with our neighbouring forces and co-ordinating our response across the Thames Valley
- Provide Detective capability to help tackle cross border crime series, focussing on serious and organised rural crime and bringing more offenders to justice.

### **Task Force Resource**

1 x Insp; 2 x Sgt; 18 x PC; 2 x DC

Inspector Stuart Hutchings is now in post and PC's, a researcher and an intelligence development officer are currently being recruited to the team.

Going forward the rural crime taskforce will be deployed via a level 2 bidding process.

The task force are not (at this stage) going to manage investigations.

## **Operating Model**

The full operating model and shift patterns have yet to be decided, however it is anticipated that the Task Force's greatest asset will be its flexibility and adaptability, ensuring that it works as a team as a whole or in parts as and when necessary. Split into two East/West teams under the leadership of two Sergeants and an Inspector, coverage will be 7 days a week, days and nights and the teams will have geographic focus in order to understand the crime types and criminals they are tackling. The Rural Crime Co-ordinator will ensure cross border links are made, crime series are identified and developed through the intelligence cell and ownership is allocated to the Task Force appropriately. They will work hand in hand with the LPAs ensuring clear communication and will support local Neighbourhood teams in enhancing their visibility, engagement and partnership working.

## **Equipment and Training**

The setting up of this new, operationally active team will incur costs most notably with regards to vehicles. In order to ensure that the Task Force is visible, targeted and intelligence led it is critical that the team are supported with the appropriate equipment in order to maximise their effectiveness. TVP are building a large Task Force who will focus on offenders many of whom will not live within the Force.

As a *minimum* the Task Force are likely to require full use of the following;

- 4x4 vehicles x 4
- Unmarked enquiry cars x 2
- Mobile ANPR
- Vivaro Van for prisoner transport and operational equipment
- Drone capability x 2
- Night vision equipment
- Mobile phones with WhatsApp functionality

Scoping will take place around the potential for corporate sponsorship and utilising LPA Vehicles but this is expected to be minimal given that that are already heavily in use.

## **Change in the Rural Crime Definition**

On 1<sup>st</sup> April TVP changed their rural crime definition. Our definition is now more in line with other leading forces in Rural Crime and was developed by practitioners to reflect the diverse nature of rural crime offences. Contact Management have received training in the identification and new definition of rural crime and our Intranet pages have been updated. All rural crimes will be flagged so that the force can better understand the rural crime picture.

The new definition was written following consultation and agreement with key stakeholders and partners.

The new definition is as follows:

*Offences that relate to farms, agriculture, wildlife, the environment and heritage sites where they are targeted due to their isolation or rural location.*

- Agricultural crime constitutes any statutory or common law offence which may be committed against people in agricultural communities, their lands, businesses and property (property includes plant and agricultural machinery and animals such as livestock and horses). Agricultural communities are those who live within a rural area as defined by the Office of National Statistics 2011 Rural Urban Classification to Super Output level and are involved in the agriculture industry.
- Environmental crime constitutes an illegal act which directly harms the environment. This element of the strategy will be largely delivered by supporting partner agencies.
- Heritage crime constitutes any offence which harms the value of heritage assets and their settings.
- Wildlife crime constitutes any unlawful act or omission, which affects any wild creature, plant or habitat

## **Recording of Rural Crimes**

Training has been rolled out across contact management teams to ensure that rural crime is being correctly recorded and flagged. The SPOC for this is Alison Ashbolt.

Alison identified that rural crime was often being recorded incorrectly and that the number of crimes affecting rural communities were not reflective of the criminality occurring.

Alison created a training package for contact management that sought to ensure that rural crimes were being correctly;

- Recognised
- Recorded
- Responded to
- Resourced

Alison put forward a case to train all contact management staff and her package was successfully rolled out between Jan and April 2021.

Alison is now turning her training package into an online course so that it can be completed by all new staff to contact management and to allow those that joined post April 2021 to receive the training.

This training has received a lot of positive feedback and as a result 10 contact management staff have volunteered to be 'rural crime SPOC's'. These SPOC's are spread throughout the three control rooms and sit under Alison and 2 other rural crime specialists within contact management.

The SPOC's and specialists will go on attachments with Local policing to enhance their knowledge and maintain their CPD.

The long term goal is for this training to be shared with Hampshire.

A bespoke online rural crime reporting tool has also been developed and is due to go live imminently.

The rural crime co-ordinators are regularly providing feedback to Alison so that she can share it with contact management where crimes and incidents are not being correctly recorded.

This training and feedback is proving successful and rural crimes are on the whole being recorded correctly at the point of reporting.

## Rural crime reported offences

Thames Valley Police data

LPA	Valid Recorded Crime		
	Aug 19 to Jul 20	Aug 20 to Jul 21	% Change
Bracknell Forest & Wokingham	81	79	-2%
Reading	3	5	67%
Slough	1	3	200%
West Berkshire	85	83	-2%
Windsor & Maidenhead	18	33	83%
Aylesbury Vale	125	126	1%
Chiltern & South Bucks	48	92	92%
Milton Keynes	27	24	-11%
Wycombe	32	58	81%
Cherwell & West Oxfordshire	111	128	15%
Oxford	2	4	100%
South & Vale	268	256	-4%
Not Assigned to LPA	7	6	-14%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>808</b>	<b>897</b>	<b>11%</b>

### NFU Mutual

The recently published National Farmers Union Rural Crime report has identified from its claim statistics that rural theft has cost the UK £43.3m in 2020, a 20% decrease on the previous year. The NFU have linked this decrease to lockdown movement restrictions, police rural crime teams and beefed up farm security.

Unfortunately NFU could not provide specific Thames Valley data but the South East data was as follows;

	Cost in 2019	Cost in 2020	% change from 2019
South East	£8.7m	£7.1m	-18.6%

## Initiatives for policing rural crime

### Country watch messaging service

It was identified that there was a real gap in sharing fast time information and intelligence with our rural communities. The WhatsApp initiative was seen as a solution for information and intelligence to be shared quickly and effectively.

The WhatsApp groups are now up and running across all LPA's with rural communities. The groups are owned by the rural communities with police (rural crime specialists) embedded within each group. The groups are an accepted model with a code of conduct that all members will use appropriate language and behaviour and that the groups will not be a platform for reporting crime.

These groups have;

- Led to an increase in intelligence gathering opportunities
- Acted as an early warning to members to spot emerging issues

- Led to a better understanding of competing demands and helped manage unrealistic expectations
- Enabled more joined up partnership working
- Assisted in alleviating the feeling of isolation within rural communities
- Been used to share crime reduction messages
- Reunited loose livestock with farmers
- Been used to promote success stories by both TVP and partners
- Been used to promote TVP central publicity campaigns
- Used to support operational activity around missing persons.

### **Success story**

PC Ian Kent (South and Vale rural crime co-ordinator) whilst reviewing WhatsApp messages saw that a gamekeeper had sent a message saying that his wife had seen a suspicious vehicle near to their field and that the driver had tampered with the gate. The presence of the gamekeeper's wife had scared off the vehicle so the gamekeeper just sent this message for the information of other members.

PC Kent called the gamekeeper and obtained descriptions of the vehicle, index and descriptions of the occupants. PC Kent submitted intel (43210349731/43210351333) and put a PNC marker on the vehicle (URN 2021 0805 1180).

The following day the vehicle was stopped by Surrey police and items including catapults, knives and other poaching paraphernalia were found.

This vehicle and the occupants are now in the national intelligence picture.

### **The Rural Crime calendar**

It was identified that there was a gap in knowledge around when rural crime was occurring and how best we could direct our resources to tackle it.

Thames Valley Police together with Country Watch have put together a rural crime calendar which highlights month by month farming and rural activity and allows for operational planning around that activity. This calendar will be utilised by neighbourhood officers and the rural crime taskforce to ensure operational effectiveness.

### **Rural Crime Snap Guides**

It was identified that there were knowledge gaps around rural crime and that all officers needed the information to hand so that they could deal effectively with any incident that they were sent to.

As such, rural crime snap guides were introduced. These provide easily accessed information and can be seen on officer's mobile phones.

Rural crime snap guides have now been uploaded onto force mobile phones to provide staff with direct access to legislation and tactics.

The guides developed so far include:

- Hunting with dogs
- Rural Crime Definition
- Stop, Search and Seizure
- Rural Crime Investigation

In development:

- Deer poaching
- Badger baiting
- Fly Tipping
- Live Stock Worrying

### **Mental Health Focus**

A concerning link was made between mental health, suicide and the rural and farming communities. An initiative has been put in place in partnership with SCAS to raise awareness and provide support for those in our rural communities who may be, or may know someone who is struggling.

- Work has been carried out with various charities to create awareness posters
- SCAS and NHS are briefed and on hand to support anyone coming forward as a result of this initiative
- Funding has been secured for printing of posters
- Suicide locations across the force have been identified and posters will be placed in these areas.

This is due to go live in September 2021.

### **Communications strategy over the coming months.**

Over the last 12 months a communications strategy has been developed to improve the way in which we get information to our rural communities.

#### **Objective:**

To build trust and confidence in rural communities

#### **Actions:**

- Develop and deliver internal communications approach – promotion of recruitment opportunities for the Taskforce (led by recruitment and retention comms)
- Develop support package for community members reporting crime and victims of rural crime
- Develop and deliver external communications approach – launching the first issue of the rural crime newsletter in Sept which will feature, successful case outcomes, prevention advice, updates on initiatives and links to support services.
- Taskforce Introduction. Soft launch Oct-21 – The Taskforce initial details will be included in the newsletter and internal comms will be issued at this point, however the full launch will not take place until the spring once the full Taskforce team is in post.
- Partnership Event (NFU) Apr-22. This may be part of the Taskforce launch depending on timings and recruitment.

Additionally, a rural crime newsletter will be produced and distributed amongst our rural communities. The first of these is due to go out in September 2021.



## **National work**

Op Traverse – National operation to tackle the links between angling and SAOC. TVP are taking part in an angling training day with the Fisheries Enforcement Support Service on 27<sup>th</sup> September. The RCTF will also be trained. Inspector James Davies is leading on this.

Operation Re-unite – National operation in response to dog theft. TVP have provided a SPOC Jackie Murdock where dog theft Intel is collated and held at FIB under DI Steve Dixon.

TVP sit on the new Police National Dog theft Working Group (Operation Reunite) which is chaired by DCC Amanda Blakeman of Gwent force, who in turn is the NPCC Lead for SOAC and also sits on the governments Pet Theft Taskforce

Jackie Murdock ensures that officers are made aware of how to record dog thefts correctly so there is some consistency and offences can be identified – this has been done in conjunction with the Force Crime Registry. Also advice around outside agencies to contact, microchip companies and support to victims is put into each crime OEL.

Op Reunite has published media messaging in line with National Strategy that TVP media team are aware of. This has been shared with our media team and TVP are compliant.

Intelligence around illegal breeding is being collated and shared. We have worked with Trading Standards, Kent police (covering Dover), South Wales Police (leading on illegal breeding) and animal charities.

Anything of cross border relevance will be fed into OP Opal (held by West Mercia) to feed the national intelligence picture around dog theft.

Numbers of thefts for 2021 to date are still low.

Operation Gallilao – National response to hare coursing. TVP are feeding into the national intelligence picture due to the travelling nature of hare coursers. This intel is regularly being derived from the WhatsApp groups.

National wildlife network – DCC Debbie Ford from Northumbria has taken over the National lead for Wildlife and Rural crime and is redeveloping the national strategy. TVP historically have not been involved in any work under this lead but Inspector Stuart Hutchings from the rural crime task force is the new TVP SPOC and will be attending the next meeting and future meetings going forward.

Operation Cobb – National response to Badger culling is being run throughout September and October 2021. This affects South and Vale, West Berkshire and Cherwell and West. Silver commander for this is Chief Inspector Ade Hall.

## **Cross border work**

Many of the Rural LPA's are linking in with neighbouring forces to join forces in tackling rural crime.

### Example

PCSO Thomas Walcott-Smith based at Wantage has strong links with PC Marc Jackson from Wiltshire Police.

Cross boarder work includes;

- Wilts Pol are included in the TVP WhatsApp group and intelligence is shared between both forces with the rural communities.
- Op Massey and Op Migrate were both joint operations with Wilts Police.
- A joint operation is currently being planned with Wilts Police to tackle rural burglaries.

## **Appendix**

### **Good work examples**

Below are some examples to provide a flavour of some of the positive activity and proactive work that has been carried out across the force. Further examples and information around those listed are available if required.

#### **Operation Jeep – Cherwell & West 43210117365**

Operation Jeep is the LPA operational response to Rural Crime. The deployments are high visibility patrols in locations identified by crime data and intelligence and where possible will link in with similar operation from neighbouring LPA's (S&V) and forces (Glos Pol).

The operation has deployed once a month over a 5 month period. The two day deployment involved landowners and game keepers as part of the resources. Using their local knowledge to enhance the patrol plan and encouraging partnership working this resulted in numerous stop checks of individuals and vehicles within the patrol area. The operation attracted positive feedback from the participating landowners who are happy to support future operations when commitments will allow.

Future operation Jeep dates are in the planning stage at this time.

#### **Aylesbury WhatsApp group**

The WhatsApp group provided intel that led to the arrest of three persons for hare coursing (Occ: 43210243332).

#### **Op Agility**

The creation of Op Agility (5xNH Resources) has allowed for an effective response to emerging problems. This team is a uniformed resource that is not responsible for any particular geographic area and increase the effectiveness of the LPA response to community/LPA priorities. This is evidenced by a Robbery/Theft/ASB series that developed in Buckingham. Op Agility (guided by PCT) were able to respond quickly to reports with visible disruption resulting in weapons being seized and suspects being disrupted. This investigations (managed by PCT) resulted in the arrest of 17 suspects. 10 were subject to youth disposals (2 charged) for offences including: possession of imitation firearm, robbery, assault, possession of offensive weapon, and violent disorder (Lead occurrence: 43200365990). The investigation team received a High Sheriff's award.