Prevention, intelligence, enforcement and reassurance – working to combat rural crime

DAVE JONES is chief constable of North Yorkshire Police and the national policing lead for Wildlife Crime and Rural Affairs. He writes exclusively for Countrywide Alliance members about how we can help bring rural crime down.

This week's guest for our Rural Crime Feature is Dave Jones, the national policing lead for Wildlife Crime and Rural Affairs. He writes exclusively for Countrywide Alliance members about how we can help bring rural crime down.

The key survey results were:

- Financial impact of crime: The cost of crime to rural communities is estimated to be £800 million equivalent to £200 for every household in the countryside. The average cost to rural households where criminals are victims of crime is £2,000 and £400 for rural businesses.
- Fear of crime: The Countryside Alliance is proud to be a stakeholder in the National Rural Crime Network, the group that works with Government, the Police and other rural organisations to tackle rural crime. Our Head of Policy, Sarah Lee, attends meetings of the network and is in regular contact with stakeholders. The network’s 2015 survey of over 17,000 people living and working in rural areas throughout England and Wales suggests the true cost of crime in rural areas could be £1,200 higher than previous figures, dwarfing earlier estimates.
- The survey indicates that hard-pressed young families and farmers are the most frequent victims of crime, with the police and businesses providing a network crime prevention advice. This network is the biggest thing in the UK, and its members work closely with our large number of specialist constables and volunteers who are making a real difference to people living in our rural communities.

The use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition technology (ANPR) and specialist resources, such as our Road Crime Team, make the 6000 miles of North Yorkshire’s roads a hostile environment for the criminal fraternity to succeed. Exploiting the opportunities of ANPR as a national intelligence source is another tactic in the fight against those who commit rural crime. The sheer volume of success in the use of this technology on a national level has resulted in continued investment by police in all areas of the UK.

Operation Checkpoint is the largest rural policing operation of its kind in the country, and saw Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Lancashire, North Yorkshire and Northumbria join forces to target cross-border criminals. This sent a clear message to travelling criminals: “If you go into rural areas to commit crime, we will catch you.”

Targeted proactive patrols involving police and our volunteer watch schemes have proven very successful. North Yorkshire is one of the safer places in the country, and we are determined to keep it that way. Operations similar to this across the UK will continue until travelling criminals get the message that rural areas are safe from soft targets, and if they do intend to go out and commit crime they will face a dedicated network intent on stopping them.

Social media continues to be a fantastic tool in the fight against crime. The recent introduction of North Yorkshire Community Messaging provides an effective way of getting information out to the community quickly. It’s a free community messaging system that allows you to register to receive the initiatives aimed at tackling rural crime, notifications and community news happening in your local neighbourhood, via text message, email or app. I urge all rural communities to engage with our large number of special constables and volunteers who are making a real difference to people living in our rural communities.

As a consequence of these findings, the network made seven recommendations including fair funding for rural areas more focused on working with partners and communities to understand and reduce crime. Embedding best practice: developing new models, new training and to better understand the role that our urban counterparts. The survey showed satisfaction levels drop to just 23% when it comes to the rural public’s perceptions of the police’s ability to solve crime.

The survey showed that people reported in rural areas more than one in four (27%) did not report the last crime of which they were a victim. This means Home Office figures of 254,000 rural crimes between April 2014 and May 2015 could be incorrect and the actual number of crimes could be as high as 403,000.

In rural communities, residents still believe a close connection to their community is important, with 27% feeling that sense of belonging has increased in the last five years. 26% of people also felt that their community had become more open to their neighbours, with 29% feeling that this was the case. Lessons for Local Authorities and other partners – two issues of greatest concern to the rural community were road safety (63%) – which the police play a crucial part in, but which they cannot resolve without partnership, and rural tipping, which is now a rural offence (61%).

The report highlights that the police and partners must continue to build on the existing work of Dyfed–Powys police force, which was awarded the Queen’s Police Medal for Distinguished Service in the New Year Honours List.

The Countryside Alliance is proud to be a stakeholder in the National Rural Crime Network, the group that works with Government, the Police and other rural organisations to tackle rural crime. The crime of the countryside is a unique policing challenge.

In North Yorkshire, Karachi, Hebburn and other areas of the North East, the police is backed up by a dedicated team of specialised officers – the Rural Taskforce. This team, consisting of 18 police officers, police community support officers and civilians, is spread out across our huge county and are patrolling remote areas of North Yorkshire, engaging with people and businesses to provide advice and assistance.

The number of offences reported by rural communities is high, topping 43% of the total number of crimes reported. However, the increase is not matched by the increase in the number of people to report crime. The number of people reporting crime has barely increased, while the number of crimes reported has increased by 22%.

In the New Year Honours list, Mike was awarded a CBE and named British Crime Commissioner for the North East, and other rural ISSPs will be named in the list.

The report covers the network’s two-year project: the Rural Crime Enforcers Conference. People and partners shared learning and experiences. The event was greatly beneficial networking exercise that showcased the dedication, expertise and passion of these individuals and groups. It was a great success. People and partners shared learning and experiences.

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