



One in four not reporting crime they were a victim of in rural areas

Crime has always been a key issue throughout the countryside, but this has only risen up the national agenda over the last few years, thanks to a growing awareness of the problems rural communities are facing. However, this increased awareness is often not felt by the communities that live and work in the countryside, with 47% of people who responded to our 2020 Rural Crime Survey telling us they don't think the police take rural crime seriously and 38% said that they have had a crime committed against them in the last 12 months.

The extent of crime in rural areas is only part of the problem. For many people, whether they have fallen victim to crime or not, the simple fear of crime can have as great a detrimental effect on their quality of life as the actual experience of crime itself. The effect of long-term emotional stress, loss of confidence - particularly among young people, families and farmers - should not be underestimated. This fear of crime is also exacerbated by rural isolation.

We are also concerned that the people who make up these communities don't get the support through public services that are more widely available in urban areas. Coupled with an absence of a visible police presence, and the fact that rural crime is often not taken seriously, it is leaving those rural businesses and communities feeling undervalued and even more isolated, for which there is simply no excuse.

The crimes which were recorded as the most frequently committed in rural areas, include fly-tipping, agricultural machinery theft and trespass [trespass is not in itself criminal unless aggravated], with respondents wanting the police to prioritise tackling these crimes.

Additionally, according to the survey, there is a serious problem of crime being underreported in rural areas, with one in four not reporting crime they were a victim of. Those surveyed felt it was either a waste of time to report it or that the police would not be able to do anything. This is why 47% of people don't think the police take rural crime seriously and 57% of people don't think rural policing has improved since Police and Crime Commissioners were introduced in 2012.

The implication of these findings is that we have a rural population simply putting up with the crime they experience and making do as best they can. There is often no escape from the effects of rural crime, with the fear of crime doing just as much damage as the crimes that are committed.

Good rural policing is about far more than numbers of police officers on the ground. If we truly want to tackle rural crime, then we must form effective partnerships between the police, rural communities and other authorities to ensure that the needs of our rural communities are truly understood so that the availability of services matches those needs.

It is clear from these results that there is a lot to do in tackling rural crime and working with communities to ensure the impact of it is lessened, and to tackle the crime problems rural communities face.

Survey results

We undertook this survey in March 2020 ahead of the Police and Crime Commissioner elections which were due to take place in May 2020 but were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over 8,000 people, who live or work in the countryside, took the time to give us their views on how crime impacted on their lives, about crimes that had been committed against them, and the policing of rural communities.

These results will help influence how rural policing is prioritised in rural communities and ensure that Police and Crime Commissioners, the police and other authorities understand the needs, concerns and priorities of rural communities.

- **94% of those surveyed think crime is significant in their community**
 - 38% very significant
 - 35% quite significant
 - 21% somewhat significant
- **74% think crime has increased in the last 12 months**
- **38% of people have had a crime committed against them in the last 12 months and the top 6 rural crimes reported were**
 - Fly-tipping - 39%
 - Agricultural machinery theft - 35%
 - Trespass - 30%
 - Theft from outbuildings - 30%
 - Wildlife crime/ hare poaching - 29%
 - Animal rights activism - 27%
- **24% of those crimes were not reported to the police due to**
 - 54% said it was a waste of time/would be no point
 - 46% thought police could not have done anything
 - 16% felt it was too trivial/not worth reporting
 - 15% dealt with the matter themselves
 - 15% had previous bad experience with police/criminal justice system
- **The crimes which police should be tackling in rural communities in order of priority are:**
 1. Agricultural machinery theft
 2. Fly-tipping
 3. Livestock rustling
 4. Poaching – deer and hare
- **48% of people had installed crime prevention measures in the last 12 months due to an increased fear of crime (66%) and being a victim of crime (33%)**
 - 72% put in security lighting
 - 67% locked vehicles and secured keys
 - 58% installed CCTV, video or infra-red
- **56% of people who reported a crime were dissatisfied with the police response**
- **47% of people don't think the police take rural crime seriously**
- **57% of people don't think rural policing has improved since Police and Crime Commissioners were introduced in 2012**
- **47% of people rate the police as 'good' or 'excellent' in their area**

Recommendations

Crime in rural areas is often the same as that experienced in urban areas, but different solutions are needed to tackle them. There are also some crimes which are unique to rural areas such as agricultural machinery theft, sheep worrying/rustling, and hare poaching, but many are not. However, the response from authorities should be just the same as to crimes that are undertaken in our towns and cities.

- **A National Rural Crime Taskforce** must be set up to ensure there is a greater understanding of the needs of rural communities by police/government and other partners to ensure the problem of rural crime is tackled and appropriate solutions are identified.

Policing in rural areas brings its own challenges with isolated, sparsely populated areas, and limited access to support services. This means that it is expensive to police on a per capita basis and, as resources come under ever increasing pressures, this is becoming more challenging. Therefore, it is essential that rural police forces receive a fair funding settlement that allows them to serve their communities and tackle crime in rural areas appropriately.

- **Review the police funding formula** to reflect the unique nature of policing in rural areas and take into account the cost of delivering services in a sparsely-populated area.

The findings of this survey indicate that we have a rural population simply putting up with the crime they experience and making do as best they can while feeling that crime in rural areas is not taken seriously by the police. Offences are going unreported because of the belief that the police and the criminal justice system don't properly understand the issues that rural communities face, such as the impact on a business of being unable to operate due to theft of machinery or the impact rural isolation has on people.

- **Training** must be provided so that the unique nature and impact of rural crime is better understood by the judiciary and police, and the response they provide is reflective of the crime.

Police resources are routinely focussed on areas that have the greatest 'threat, risk, and harm' and far too often rural crime is seen as low-level crime or a crime with no victims. This is not the case. Particular challenges exist in tackling crimes that are unique to rural areas, such as poaching, farm theft and livestock rustling. Other crimes such as drug dealing, domestic abuse and burglary often present greater challenges for policing when perpetrated in a rural context.

- **Take rural crime seriously**, recognising the impact it has on the victims and communities is no less than in urban areas and that rural crime should not be underestimated but treated with the same seriousness as in any other area.