

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE BRIEFING NOTE

Rural Crime and Public Services

House of Commons, Opposition Day Debate



“Calls on the Government to ensure that the personal, social and economic costs of crime and anti-social behaviour in rural areas are fully understood and acted upon”

(Jeremy Corbyn, Diane Abbott, Louise Haigh, Sue Hayman, Holly Lynch, and Nicholas Brown)

Wednesday 6th May, until 7:00pm

Background:

- Crime is a key issue for rural communities and has risen up the agenda of rural concerns over the last few years. In many surveys, crime and anti-social behaviour, and policing are key concerns - second only to the National Health Service.
- 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 a detrimental effect on their quality of life. 39% of rural people are worried about becoming a victim of crime compared with 19% nationally. It has been suggested that anticipation of crime has the potential to cause greater harm than the actual experience of crime itself due to the effect of long-term stress and other mental health considerations. This is exacerbated by rural isolation. Rural communities are often without reliable mobile signal or internet, and an absence of any visible police presence.
- Crime is also underreported in rural areas with more than one in four not reporting the last crime they were a victim of because they either felt it was a waste of time or that the police would not be able to do anything. This is further supported by low satisfaction rates of police performance in rural areas, with only 24% of the rural public perceiving the police have the ability to solve crime. The crimes which are perceived to go untackled in rural areas included speed and dangerous driving and fly-tipping. The implication of these facts is that we have a rural population simply putting up with the crime they experience and making do as best they can. 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.
- Fly-tipping has become a major problem in the UK, and the Countryside Alliance has long campaigned on the problem of fly-tipping in the countryside. It is not a victimless crime and government figures only tell part of the story as official figures on the number of incidents on private land and the associated clear up costs are patchy. Evidence suggests that private land owners spend upwards of £47 million a year clearing up fly-tipped waste. However, this figure is widely accepted to be on the low side. Residents and businesses in the countryside pay as much, and often more, per head of population for policing and deserve equal treatment to their urban counterparts. Rural crime, including fly-tipping, must be taken seriously by the police and local authorities.

- The UK has some of the most robust wildlife and animal welfare legislation in the world. The illegal persecution of birds of prey can never be justified, and any incident of illegal persecution is one too many.
- Efforts to stamp out illegal activity are being made collaboratively through the Protection Against Wildlife Crime (PAW) and the Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group (RPPDG), and at the species-specific level through the Hen Harrier Joint Action Plan. Progress is being made, the RSPB's Bird Crime Report 2016 highlighted an overall reduction of wildlife crime against birds of prey. The past four years have seen continuous decreases in shooting and poisoning of birds of prey from 106 to 59 confirmed cases in the UK.
- Any mention of illegal persecution should take account of historical trends in population numbers. 100 years ago there were no hen harriers on mainland UK, today there are around 645 breeding pairs across the country. In 1963 there were 360 pairs of peregrines in the UK, today there are 1500. Over the past 20 years breeding pairs of red kites have increased from 160 to 1600, and pairs of buzzards from 14,500 to 68,000.
- Good relations between rural communities, local police and other authorities is far more effective in tackling rural crime. It is vital that the voice of the countryside is heard and the personal, social and economic costs of crime and anti-social behaviour are fully understood and acted upon.

Countryside Alliance calls for:

- Fair funding for rural policing because providing services across large, sparsely populated areas can be expensive on a per capita basis, and the Government's funding formula should take that into account. In addition, there needs to be better targeting of police resources because tackling crimes from poaching and farm theft to drug dealing and domestic abuse present greater challenges for policing when perpetuated in a rural context.
- Better use of intelligence from 'on-the-ground' groups such as Neighbourhood Watch and Farm Watch, as well as improved collaboration between neighbouring forces to combat cross-border crime.
- Improved use of modern surveillance and technology to ensure crime is tackled effectively. Modern policing needs to be in step with the latest technology and techniques, enabling police officers to tackle crime, share intelligence and work more efficiently.
- Increase in the numbers of Special Constables or "Parish Police Officers". It is important that people feel that rural crime is being taken seriously, and increased visibility of police in rural areas would give reassurance and support to local concerns.
- Greater support for landowners: anti-fly-tipping measures; utilisation of compensation orders; and closer working relationships with local authorities in recognition to particular problems caused by waste fly-tipped on private land.
- Tougher penalties on perpetrators: imposing and enforcing penalties which better reflect the seriousness of the crime, such as seizing vehicles used to fly-tip, is vital.

- Rural communities must report all crime: There is a clear reluctance to report crime in rural areas, which could be due to fear of repercussions in small communities, a lack of confidence in the vigour of a police response or a mix of other reasons. However, for the Police to meet the needs of rural communities and set appropriate policing priorities, then rural communities must report all crime, no matter how trivial they perceive it.

Latest Statistics:

- Statistics from the latest National Rural Crime Network Survey Report 2015
 - 27% of respondent did not report the last crime they were a victim of. Crimes which were most likely to be under reported included theft from outbuildings and agricultural materials, where only 50% of crimes were reported and 33% did not bother to report theft of fuel.
 - Crimes which are perceived to go untackled in rural areas included speeding and dangerous driving (46% mentioned this) and fly tipping (40%).
 - 38% of rural people rate the police as good (32%) or excellent (6%) and amongst rural businesses this figure was just 32%.
 - Satisfaction levels were 24% when it came to the rural public's perceptions of the police's ability to solve crime, 31% for reducing crime and 38% when being relied upon to be there when needed. 46% of rural people had a negative feeling about any police involvement they experienced, which 34% said was mostly due to frustration.
 - On average insurance claims only covered less than half the true cost of recovering from a crime because of factors like property repairs, increased security, loss of earnings, legal fees and higher insurance premiums following a claim. Less than 1 in 3 people (27%) made an insurance claim to cover their loss and these tended to be related to significant losses like agricultural machinery or burglary of a property.
 - 39% of rural people are worried about becoming a victim of crime compared with 19% nationally.
- [Fly-tipping statistics for England 2016/17](#), compiled by Defra, show the following information:
 - For the 2016/17 year, local authorities in England dealt with around 1 million (1,002,000) fly-tipping incidents, a 7% increase from the previous year.
 - The estimated cost of clearance for fly-tipping to local authorities in England in 2016/17 was £57.7 million.
 - These statistics are based on fly-tipping incidents reported by local authorities in England, and exclude the majority of private-land incidents.
- Any mention of illegal persecution of birds should take account of historical trends in population numbers. 100 years ago there were no hen harriers on mainland UK, today there are around 645 breeding pairs. In 1963 there were 360 pairs of peregrines in the UK, today there are 1500. Over the last 20 years breeding pairs of red kites have increased from 160 to 1600, and pairs of buzzards from 14,500 to 68,000.
- Data from the Ministry of Justice shows that more than 94% of Hunting Act convictions did not involve registered hunts. Most were poaching offences relating to hare and deer.

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