

Westminster Hall Debate, Richard Holden MP

Wednesday 26 January 2022

- Results of the 2021 Countryside Alliance rural crime survey were released at the end of November.
- The results built on the previous year's survey and showed that **one in nine people had not seen a police officer in the past week** and **seven in ten people reported an increase in crime over the past 12 months**.
- With concern about crime in rural areas growing it is not surprising that 46% of people who responded to our 2021 Rural Crime Survey told us they don't think the police take rural crime seriously and one in four did not bother reporting the crime to the police.
- 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 46% of people don't think the police take rural crime seriously and 59% of people disagree with the statement that the police are spending more time on tackling rural crime
- 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.
- 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.

Countryside Alliance comment:

Those living in the countryside deserve to have their voice and policing concerns listened to. Police resources must be distributed fairly and officers need to be sufficiently trained and equipped to deal with the type of crimes being carried out in the countryside, in all weathers and all terrains. Criminals need to know they cannot and will not get away with targeting rural people.

There's a clear perception among many in the countryside that rural crime is not taken seriously enough. This fear is exacerbated when police officers are not seen to be out and about on patrol.

Survey results

Nearly 3,000 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. We undertook our annual rural crime survey in November 2021.

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.

2021 Rural Crime Survey	2020 Rural Crime Survey
<p>↑ 95% of those surveyed think crime is significant in their community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 34% very significant • 39% quite significant • 22% somewhat significant 	<p>94% of those surveyed think crime is significant in their community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 38% very significant • 35% quite significant • 21% somewhat significant
<p>↓ 70% think crime has increased in the last 12 months</p>	<p>74% think crime has increased in the last 12 months</p>
<p>43% of people have had a crime committed against them in the last 12 months and the top 6 rural crimes reported were</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑ Fly-tipping - 43% ↑ Trespass - 36% ↓ Agricultural machinery theft - 32% ↓ Wildlife crime/ hare poaching - 30% ↓ Theft from outbuildings - 27% ↑ Criminal damage – arson/vandalism - 24% 	<p>38% of people have had a crime committed against them in the last 12 months and the top 6 rural crimes reported were</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fly-tipping - 39% • Agricultural machinery theft - 35% • Trespass - 30% • Theft from outbuildings - 30% • Wildlife crime/ hare poaching - 29% • Animal rights activism - 27%
<p>↑ 28% of those crimes were not reported to the police due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 52% said it was a waste of time/would be no point • 42% thought police could not have done anything • 16% felt it was too trivial/not worth reporting • 16% dealt with the matter themselves • 15% had previous bad experience with police/criminal justice system 	<p>24% of those crimes were not reported to the police due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<p>The crimes which police should be tackling in rural communities in order of priority are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑ 1. Fly-tipping ↑ 2. Livestock rustling ↑ 3. Poaching – deer and hare ↓ 4. Agricultural machinery theft 	<p>The crimes which police should be tackling in rural communities in order of priority are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agricultural machinery theft 2. Fly-tipping 3. Livestock rustling 4. Poaching – deer and hare
<p>↑ 53% of people had installed crime prevention measures in the last 12 months due to an increased fear of crime (62%) and being a victim of crime (37%)</p>	<p>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%)</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 74% put in security lighting • 68% locked vehicles and secured keys • 65% installed CCTV, video or infra-red 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 72% put in security lighting • 67% locked vehicles and secured keys • 58% installed CCTV, video or infra-red
<p>↓ 48% of people who reported a crime were dissatisfied with the police response</p>	<p>56% of people who reported a crime were dissatisfied with the police response</p>
<p>↓ 46% of people don't think the police take rural crime seriously</p>	<p>47% of people don't think the police take rural crime seriously</p>
<p>↓ 56% of people don't think rural policing has improved since Police and Crime Commissioners were introduced in 2012</p>	<p>57% of people don't think rural policing has improved since Police and Crime Commissioners were introduced in 2012</p>
<p>↓ 40% of people rate the police as 'good' or 'excellent' in their area</p>	<p>47% of people rate the police as 'good' or 'excellent' in their area</p>
<p>↓ 19% believe that the police can be relied on to be there when you need them.</p>	<p>20% believe that the police can be relied on to be there when you need them.</p>
<p>↑ 59% disagree with the statement that the police are spending more time on tackling rural crime</p>	<p>50% disagree with the statement that the police are spending more time on tackling rural crime</p>
<p>16% of people have considered moving or leaving their local area because of crime.</p>	
<p>48% have felt intimidated by criminality or criminals over the last year. (This includes direct threats from criminals or general criminality).</p>	
<p>25% of people know the names of their local officers and how to get in touch with them (aside from ringing 101/999)?</p>	
<p>89% have not seen any officers in their local area in the last seven days.</p>	
<p>71% say the number of police officers or stations in their local area has changed since they lived there.</p>	

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. The National Rural Crime Network reported on [domestic abuse in rural areas](#) in 2019.

- **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.

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