

## One in three 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 Scottish countryside, with 32% of people who responded to our 2020 Rural Crime Survey telling us they don't think the police take rural crime seriously and 32% said that they have had a crime committed against them in the last 12 months.

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.

For many people in the countryside, 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, rural businesses and communities often are left feeling undervalued and even more isolated.

According to the survey, the crimes which were recorded as the most frequently committed in rural areas were 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 32% of people perceive the police take rural crime seriously.

It is clear from these results that crime remains a serious issue for those who and live in the countryside. Rural communities have a key role to play to ensure that authorities are fully aware of the problem. This means that rural communities must report every rural crime. Only with access to full the picture can we work together to stamp out crime in the countryside.

# Survey results

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

We undertook this survey in October 2020, and hundreds of people who live or work in the Scottish 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.

- **84% of those surveyed think crime is significant in their community**
  - 18% very significant
  - 30% quite significant
  - 36% somewhat significant
- **63% think crime has increased in the last 12 months**
- **32% of people have had a crime committed against them in the last 12 months and the top 6 rural crimes reported were**
  - Fly-tipping - 54%
  - Wildlife crime or hare poaching – 29%
  - Trespass - 26%
  - Agricultural machinery theft – 22%
  - Theft from outbuildings – 22%
  - Criminal damage, vandalism or damage to property or possessions – 22%
- **39% of those crimes were not reported to the police due to**
  - 52% thought police could not have done anything
  - 48% said it was a waste of time/would be no point
  - 24% had a previous bad experience with the police/criminal justice system
- **37% of those who reported crimes were dissatisfied with the police response**
- **The crimes which police should be tackling in rural communities in order of priority are:**
  1. Fly-tipping
  2. Agricultural machinery theft
  3. Livestock rustling
  4. Poaching deer and hare
- **35% 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 (25%)**
  - 65% put in security lighting
  - 63% lock personal items away
  - 62% locked vehicles and secured keys
- **32% of people don't think the police take rural crime seriously**
- **57% 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.

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.

Policing in rural areas brings its own challenges with isolated, sparsely populated areas, and limited access to support services but this should not be a barrier to preventing and tackling crime in rural areas.

## The Countryside Alliance believes:

- **All crimes must be reported** to the police in order for them to understand the true extent of crime in rural areas and will enable them to respond appropriately.
- **Training** must be provided so that the unique nature and impact of rural crime on a local level is better understood by the judiciary and police, and the response they provide is reflective of the crime.
- **Tailored solutions** must be developed to tackle and prevent rural crime that is reflective of the needs of local communities as laid out in Police Scotland's strategy.
- **Rural crime must be taken 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 any other area.