

Select Committee Task and Finish Group Scoping Document

Review Topic: Tackling Rural Crime in Surrey

Select Committee / Body: Surrey Police and Crime Panel

1. Relevant background

1.1 The Surrey Police and Crime Panel has previously expressed an interest in establishing a small Task Group to look at how the Police can better serve Surrey's rural communities, with the intention of informing the Police & Crime Commissioner's future work in this area.

Defining rural crime:

1.2 Various definitions of "rural" exist, although in a statistical context two definitions are recognised by Surrey's Rural Strategy 2010-2015, and these are outlined in Appendix 1.

1.3 In general terms, rural areas tend to be sparsely populated and contain smaller settlements such as villages (and sometimes towns), and have traditionally relied on agriculture as their economic basis. Rural communities are often close-knit socially, but may also be physically secluded, which may cause problems of access to transport and other services.

1.4 Whilst some crimes such as fly-tipping are more prevalent in the countryside, others such as theft, burglary, vehicle and violent crime can obviously take place in both urban and rural areas. However, the consequences of such crime can differ significantly in a rural setting due, in part, to the immediate impact on livelihoods and the lack of readily available assistance.

1.5 Such issues are highlighted in Surrey's Rural Strategy 2010-2015, which acknowledges that a lack of local police presence is an issue in some rural areas, with the perception that it can take a long time for police officers to respond to emergency calls. Crimes such as speeding, littering and fly-tipping, as well as specific types of crime such as theft of equipment and materials are also identified as particular challenges.

1.6 In addition, the impact of rural crime on both the individual and wider community can also vary, something highlighted by research undertaken by the County Councils Network in 2007¹:

1.6.1 "Becoming a victim of crime in a rural area can have a very different impact from becoming a victim in an urban area. In particular, in an area which is normally low in crime, the victim of a serious and personal crime is likely to face a much greater level of shock and more abrupt change in fear levels - rural victimisation can have a higher community impact through greater local media coverage. It is also possible that there will be less local support for those suffering due to rural crime, as a result of the absence of a 'critical mass' of victims, and a less local police presence, as the force focus their efforts on

¹ <http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/public/oxfordshirepartnership/News/FinalRITGReport.pdf>

Combating Rural Crime in Surrey

- 1.7 Despite little reference to rural crime in the Commissioner’s Police and Crime Plan (discussed in section 2.4), the Police in Surrey do facilitate a County Watch Scheme, where officers work with rural communities to help prevent and detect crime. Those that are members of the scheme receive message alerts via SMS and / or email about suspicious activity or incidents in the local areas. Members can themselves report concerns which, once verified, are distributed via the network. Members also receive regular bulletins about local crime, emerging trends, suspicious callers and vehicles, and warning signs advertising the scheme are displayed around the countryside to act as a deterrent. The scheme was spearheaded by PC John Hockley, the Force’s Rural Communities Liaison Officer, and has recently reached over 1,600 members.
- 1.8 At a local level, parish and town councils have been influential in promoting community safety measures, including the introduction of CCTV. In some areas more PCSOs have been deployed and the Police have undertaken specific initiatives in ‘hotspots’ around speeding, youth crime and tack marking. Work is also sometimes undertaken by local CSPs such as in Mole Valley where rural crime has been identified as a strategic priority for 2013/14. In addition, in 2011 Police forces across the south-east, including Surrey, collaborated² to produce a film in a bid to spread the message about rural crime prevention as widely as possible.
- 1.9 However, despite some positive steps, previous research conducted by the Surrey Rural Partnership³ found that many farmers felt that the police were ineffective in dealing with rural crime and that rural communities were generally poorly served.
- 1.9.1 *“[The Police] don’t appear to do much about rural crime and it is left to the farmers’ own “jungle drums” network to galvanise forces and make others aware of what is happening so that they can take appropriate action.” [Page 39 of the Farm Study]*
- 1.10 The need to address the perception of crime in rural areas is also recognised by Surrey’s Rural Strategy 2010-2015.

² <http://www.rsnonline.org.uk/services/police-shut-gate-on-rural-crime>

³ <http://www.surreyruralpartnership.org.uk/assets/files/Farm%20Study%203%202009.pdf>

<p>2.0 Why this is a scrutiny item</p> <p>2.1 Surrey Police acknowledge⁴ that one unfortunate side-effect of the economic downturn has been an increase in incidents and reports of rural crime, with the Police urging people living, working and playing in Surrey’s villages and countryside to be extra vigilant, to keep an eye out for any suspicious activity and report it as soon as possible.</p> <p>2.2 Whilst a recent survey and analysis⁵ of countryside claims data by a leading rural insurer, NFU Mutual, has suggested that rural crime is falling following a peak⁶ in 2010, there remains concern, both nationally and in Surrey, that the Police could dedicate more time and resource to tackling the issue.</p> <p>2.3 Indeed, in the run-up to the first Police and Crime Commissioner elections in 2012, the County Land & Business Association unveiled a manifesto on rural crime, designed to explain to newly elected Commissioners the specific needs of the countryside and to emphasise the different impacts of rural and urban crime.</p> <p>2.4 However, whilst respondents to Surrey’s Commissioner’s focus groups in early 2013 “requested a focus on both urban and rural crime”⁷, the final Police & Crime Plan only contains one minor reference to rural crime, as set out below:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">2.4.1 <i>“I will work with partners in community safety in Surrey, such as the County, Borough and District Councils, the Health Service and Criminal Justice partners help to ensure that they are contributing to your wish to see a zero tolerance approach. This includes [...] Joint actions with a wide range of partners to reduce anti-social behaviour and crime in all forms – whether it be working together to reduce town centre violence, business crime, rural and wildlife crime or any other loutish activity” (page 6-7)</i></p> <p>2.5 Combined with concerns from some residents that the Police currently concentrate resources within urban areas, that Police attendance at Parish meetings is patchy and response times to rural incidents slow, this is potentially an area where the Commissioner needs to divert more attention.</p>
<p>3.0 What question is the task group aiming to answer?</p> <p>3.1 How can Surrey’s rural communities be better served by the Police and how can the Commissioner support this?</p>
<p>4.0 Aim</p> <p>4.1 To help the Commissioner better understand the needs of Surrey’s rural communities to inform his future priorities and plans.</p>

⁴ <http://www.surrey.police.uk/keeping-safe/protecting-your-property-or-business/rural-crime>
⁵ <http://www.nfumutual.co.uk/farming/initiatives/rural-crime/>
⁶ <http://www.which.co.uk/news/2011/08/rural-crime-on-the-rise-261461/>
⁷ <http://www.surrey-pcc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/01b-Result-summary-of-consultation-for-plan.pdf>

5.0 Objectives

5.1 In order to achieve the aims of the project, the Task Group will need to explore and understand the following:

- The Commissioners current policy position in relation to rural crime
- Existing schemes and initiatives being undertaken by the Police, Borough / Districts / Parish Councils, local CSPs and other partners
- Current views of rural communities towards rural policing
- The policy stance taken by other Police and Crime Commissioners

6.0 Scope (within / out of)

6.1 The Commissioner is responsible for assessing, supporting and challenging the overall performance of Surrey Police but is not permitted to obstruct the operational independence of the police force and the chief constable who leads it. It is therefore not, for example, within the power of the Commissioner to directly instruct the Chief Constable on the geographical deployment of officers in rural areas, nor the duties they are assigned to.

6.2 However, it is the PCCs responsibility to set the overall strategic direction of the Police and, in the case of rural crime, the Commissioner stance is not clear. The Panel may therefore wish to commission a Task Group to assist in the development of this policy area.

6.3 Nevertheless, in carrying out this piece of work, the Panel will need to ensure that it is mindful of the Commissioner's remit and the extent of his powers. It will need to ensure that any recommendations made as a result of the work do not attempt to fetter the operational independence of the Chief Constable and are aimed at the Commissioner.

7.0 Outcomes for Surrey / Benefits

7.1 To improve the service received by rural communities.

Proposed work plan

It is important to clearly allocate who is responsible for the work, to ensure that Members and officers can plan the resources needed to support the task group.

Timescale	Task	Responsible
TBC		

<p>Possible Witnesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police & Crime Commissioner / Deputy Police & Crime Commissioner • Surrey Police, including the Rural Communities Liaison Officer • Rural Community representatives • Local Community Safety Managers / CSP Representatives • Parish Council Representatives • Borough / District Council Representatives 	
<p>Useful Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surrey Rural Partnership Farm Study 3 (2009) • Surrey Rural Strategy 2010-2015 • County Council Network - Strong Counties and Vibrant Rural Communities Task Group Report • Surrey Police and Crime Plan 	
<p>Potential barriers to success (Risks / Dependencies)</p> <p>Limited powers of the PCC: As outlined in the Scope section, the PCC is not permitted to obstruct the operational independence of the police force and the chief constable who leads it. It is the PCCs responsibility to set the overall strategic direction of the Police, not to determine the way in which that vision is achieved. The Panel will therefore need to ensure that any eventual recommendations (if it chooses to make them) are realistic and implementable.</p>	
<p>Proposed Task Group Members</p>	<p>Dorothy Ross-Tomlin Ken Harwood Margaret Cooksey Pat Frost Richard Billington</p>
<p>Co-opted Members</p>	<p>TBC</p>
<p>Spokesman for the Group</p>	<p>TBC</p>
<p>Scrutiny Officer/s</p>	<p>Damian Markland</p>

This page is intentionally left blank