

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 15 MARCH 2016

REPORT BY HEAD OF COMMUNITY SAFETY AND HEALTH SERVICES

CRIME TRENDS IN RURAL EAST HERTS

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All rural wards

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To report to Community Scrutiny on known crime trends in Rural locations in East Herts
- To highlight the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) response to rural crime
- To highlight the gaps in 'rural' crime types/locations

RECOMMENDATION FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

That:

(A)	Concerns on the nature of rural crime be forwarded to the Executive Member for Environment and Public Open Spaces and the Community Safety Partnership; and
(B)	actions which could assist partners in highlighting rural crime types/locations be identified

1.0 Background

1.1 Local Authority's duty to consider crime and disorder implications is as follows -

"Without prejudice to any other obligation imposed on it, it shall be the duty of each authority to which this section applies to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area."

Section 17(1) Crime and Disorder Act 1998

- 1.2 There is no national recognised definition of rural crime. Across the country police forces and Community Safety Partnerships have adopted their own definition of rural crime. In Hertfordshire a definition of rural crime is yet to be identified.
 - 1.3 East Herts population is considered 30% rural where 43,421 people live in rural areas compared to a total of 99,600 living in the five main towns. It is worth noting that Buntingford is often considered rural.
 - 1.4 East Herts Council and its partners work closely with communities and individuals living in rural areas to respond and where possible prevent rural crime.
 - 1.5 As there is no formal definition of rural crime, evaluation of crime trends can only be accurately analysed using existing crime types such as; burglaries, criminal damage, anti-social behaviour, drug offences, theft of and from motor vehicles, assault and shoplifting. As a result rural crime levels are lower than urban areas due to the nature of where these crimes often take place against vastly different population levels. Despite this, crime does affect rural areas, and in contrast the CSP often sees rural crime as a priority.
 - 1.6 “Rural crimes” are often associated with rural businesses. In addition, crime affecting rural areas can be inherently difficult to detect in comparison with urban crime due to sparse populations. As a result witness opportunities are minimised and the detection of offenders reduced due to the lack CCTV and ANPR coverage of the road network.
 - 1.7 East Herts CSP therefore focuses resources and activity on prevention and engagement within rural communities and individuals considered at risk.
- 2.0 Report
- 2.1 The types of crime which affect our rural communities are known to be associated with rural business, such as hare coursing, theft of fuel from farms, theft of farm vehicles and fly-tipping on private land.
 - 2.2 The above crimes are not defined and clearly recorded as such, and are therefore grouped into existing recognised crime

categories. The CSP is therefore unable to accurately report on the levels of “rural crime” affecting individuals within rural locations. This is where close partnership working with our rural communities is paramount.

2.3 Hertfordshire Police Safer Neighbourhood Team work very closely with our rural communities, always seeking to improve communication and to gain intelligence of the types of crime affecting rural East Herts. Below is a list of activity which demonstrates how the CSP responds and aims to prevent rural crime within the district:

- There are nearly 200 persons from the rural community on a text based message system falling within the Online Watch Link (OWL) system. This improved communication is also important in addressing a major factor in policing rural communities, fear and perception of crime. In addition, the Police have a presence the NFU branch meetings of the NFU to offer preventative advice on emerging trends, both nationally and locally.
- Operation STOMP – This is based on identifying vulnerability, be that a vulnerable person, property or premises with a view to initiating support for the person, provision or advice on preventative measures by providing shed alarms, locks, timers, and purse bells, much of which has been funded through the CSP grant. Over a 6 month period Little Berkhamstead, Much Hadham, Furneux Pelham, Stanstead Abbots were visited. During these operations partners from East Herts attend, with Fire and Rescue who conduct and fit smoke alarms.
- Operation AGRARIAN – Is a 6 weekly multi-agency proactive overt operation aimed at targeting criminality on the road network. All vehicles are stopped and inspected, with checks made on their occupants. The operation has a deterrent value whilst gaining valuable intelligence to support other proactive initiatives. There have been notable results during these operations, for example, a small van stopped at Buntingford resulted in the arrest of its driver for possession of drugs and subsequent searches and investigation revealed a cannabis factory and cultivation operation.

- Evening AGRARIAN – A proactive operation, working with the special constabulary and other police volunteers conducting static vehicle controls on minor routes during evening periods. These volunteers are supported on these by minimal staffing of regular officers and assist in delivering reassurance to the rural community.
- Technical Assets – Having identified this factor as having negative impact on the police investigative process in rural areas, the CSP has invested (through CSP grant funding) in moveable ANPR capability and now has six ‘spike’ ANPR cameras which are managed by the rural team deployed at locations across the district. Their deployment locations are reviewed fortnightly at the CSP operational planning group meeting. In addition the NHT use items of plant and machinery which are trackable and forensically clean in rural areas to assist in identifying criminality. These machines are supplied by agricultural dealers at no cost to the CSP and are another example of an effective partnership.
- All Terrain Vehicles (ATV’s) – The rural team has introduced an ATV capability to the Constabulary and utilise this capability to effectively target rural issues such as hare coursing, off road motorcycles, and poaching. Again they bring reassurance to the community and now form part of the deployment fleet. They are used extensively to support missing person searches and large events such as Standon Calling where their agility results in a reduction in staffing compared with historic levels. Standon Calling is an annual event with between 5000 and 10,000 attendees at past events.
- CSP partners attend the annual “Barn Meet” organised by the NFU. Herts Police engage with farmers, rural landowners and businesses, where at the Meet in December people were in attendance voicing their concerns to the police on matters of rural crime. The dominating issue raised here was fly tipping.

2.4 The environmental crime issue of fly tipping is seen as an emerging trend within the district and has been growing in the last 12 months following a period of decline and then relative stability for a few years raised. It has been raised as a concern at recent meetings with the rural community.

- 2.5 The number of fly tips cleared by the Council have increased over the last year from 777 in 2014 to 914 in 2015. The definition of a fly tip includes small items of waste and litter including a single black sack of waste or larger. Although many of these were small items, fly tipping across Hertfordshire has been growing. While the increase in East Herts has been significantly lower than some neighbouring rural districts, it remains a significant concern to both the Council and the Police.
- 2.6 Local authorities are responsible for the removal and disposal of fly tips on their own land and on the public highway. On private land it is the owners' responsibility to secure their land to prevent fly tipping and they are responsible for the removal and disposal of any waste that is illegally disposed.
- 2.7 However the Council does carry out investigations of fly tipping on both public and private land where notified, and if there is adequate evidence will prosecute the offender. In most cases there is no evidence to identify the offender. In 2015 there were 24 formal investigations and this resulted in one prosecution and £1,131 in fines and costs. Some other minor offences were dealt with through formal caution/fixed penalty notice.
- 2.8 Some recent feedback has shown that some landowners are not reporting offences on private land to the Council and may be missing an opportunity to provide intelligence and an enforcement opportunity.
- 2.9 The Hertfordshire Fly-Tipping Strategic Group was set up some years ago and the Police have a lead role. The Group shares intelligence across local authority borders and co-ordinates action to tackle fly tippers. East Herts Council is represented on this group.
- 2.10 The Council publicises information about how local communities and land owners can help to prevent fly tipping on its web site, in LINK Magazine and through regular press releases. In the light of recent feedback from landowners it will be carrying out a further publicity campaign to encourage them to report incidents on private land and promoting the advice, recently written by the National Fly tipping Prevention Group. This guidance will be distributed with the support of CSP partners and through the relevant Watches which many landowners are signed up to.

- 2.11 A study of the timing and geographical spread of fly tips is currently being conducted and a report containing more detail about potential causes and opportunities for further action will be submitted to the Environment Scrutiny Committee in June.
- 2.12 The CSP evaluates crime trends annually in the Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment. The assessment has followed a similar format for the last 10 years, evaluating recognised crime types, such as vehicle crime, ASB and criminal damage for example. The assessment creates CSP priorities and an action plan to cover a 12 month period.
- 2.13 The strategic assessment for 2016-17 has a section on rural crime. However, this is sparse due to there being no recognised definition of rural crime. In addition, the five main towns are often highlighted as hotspots as the majority of crime accumulates in areas of high population. Therefore crimes considered inherently rural can often go unnoticed.
- 2.14 Partnership engagement with our rural communities provides anecdotal insight into the crimes affecting individuals within rural areas, crimes which do not often feature in high level assessments and reports.
- 2.15 Conversations with individuals within rural areas suggest cybercrime, fraud and environmental crime, such as fly tipping are issues affecting them. Evidence to suggest the prevalence of these does not feature within the annual CSP Strategic Assessment.
- 2.16 It is therefore recommended that figures for environmental crime and evidence to suggest the level of cybercrime and fraud are included within the 2017-18 annual CSP strategic assessment.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

This report was compiled with information supplied by Herts Police and East Herts Council.

- 3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers - none

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