



Cambridgeshire
Police & Crime
Commissioner

TO: Business Co-ordination Board
FROM: Chief Constable
DATE: 24th June 2013

RURAL CRIME UPDATE

1. Introduction.

1.1 This paper will seek to outline the current structure, processes and activity for the management and tackling of rural criminality within Cambridgeshire.

2. Background

2.1 The Rural Community Action Team (RCAT) was established in August 2004 as a direct response to the issue of hare coursing (Operation Dornier) in rural areas of Cambridgeshire. There was little supporting process around the wider management of rural criminality at this time.

2.2 RCAT became increasingly effective in tackling this specific issue, reducing hare coursing incidents from 950 in 2003 to less than 100 by 2009.

2.3 Following on from their success in tackling hare coursing, RCAT naturally widened out its remit to cover other areas of rural crime and also provide a Neighbourhood Policing Team able to respond to the needs of Cambridgeshire's rural community. The team consisted of a Sergeant and four Constables with PCSO support.

2.4 This model offered excellent community liaison, however proved less effective in terms of utilising an intelligent co-ordinating and tasking process, providing resource resilience and enhancing wider performance.

2.5 During the Operation Re-design process in 2011/12 a decision was made to transfer the rural crime remit to the Centralised Intelligence Bureau (CIB). In April 2012 the Rural Crime Team (RCT) was formed consisting of a Sergeant, eight constables, one PCSO from the CIB Tactical Team with Field and Strategic Intelligence Officer support. RCT are part of the wider Tactical Team, however, with a specific rural crime remit when identified.

- 2.6 RCT are a force resource, deployed and managed from the centre relying on an accurate and timely, tactical intelligence and tasking process to target those individuals and criminality causing most harm to the rural community.
- 2.7 Core business areas include seasonal hare coursing, metal and plant theft, fuel theft in rural areas, stack arson, raves, specialist wildlife crime, livestock and tack theft. This list is not exhaustive and is prioritised based on threat, harm and risk.

3. Governance

- 3.1 The Tactical Team Inspector manages daily business of RCT.
- 3.2 A Cambridgeshire Rural Community Action Group (RCAG) meeting occurs quarterly, chaired by Chief Inspector (South Cambs Police District). Core membership includes RCT, Countryside Watch, Country Land and Business association (CLA), National Farming Union (NFU), Community Safety Partnerships, and council department representatives as required.
- 3.3 An Eastern Region Rural Crime Group meets quarterly, also chaired by the Chief Inspector (South Cambs) to discuss rural criminality crossing force boundaries and agree strategic and tactical objectives.
- 3.4 Partnership working is key to the success of the existing RCAT team, providing reassurance to the otherwise isolated rural communities and maintaining a conduit for intelligence flow. The Constabulary has invested heavily (financially and collaboratively) in its partnership with Countryside Watch who have a current membership of around 800 farmers and rural residents of Cambridgeshire.
- 3.5 ACC Mark Hopkins (Operational Policing) chairs an annual meeting of key partners to include Countryside Watch, CLA, NFU and RCT.
- 3.6 Weekly updates of activity and rural crime is sent to partners for sharing and a good network of intelligence feed exists via the CIB, RCT and Countryside Watch. PCSO Dear manages a Horsewatch website on behalf of the organisation.
- 3.7 RCT is invaluablely supported by five Special Constables who are attached specifically to the CIB.

4. Tactical Activity

- 4.1 Since its inception in April 2012, the RCT, wider CIB and partners have been working together to tackle a variety of rural criminality issues.
- 4.2 Metal theft has been a key success with overall crime reducing from 2311 to 810 year on year. Of significance to this reduction has been co-ordinated and targeted metal theft days of action whereby officers have conducted operations at scrap metal dealers (SMD) to enforce legislation, inspect records of transactions and target those people who are transporting and selling metal unlawfully. All scrap metal dealers have been graded Red, Amber and Green in terms of risk of involvement in criminality. The last day of action was on 21 May 2013 and these will continue throughout the year.

- 4.3 ~~Covert~~ Work has been conducted around compliance with legislation and metal thieves. Operation Nerva resulted in early June of the arrest of a prolific offender involved in theft of Catalytic Converters with others to follow, together with investigation of the handling of the property by SMD's.
- 4.4 Hare coursing is a significant problem which affects the farming community and land owners across Cambridgeshire. The annual season lasts from October to March and involves criminal trespass, poaching and intimidation by offenders. RCT designated a significant response to the problem this year with almost daily patrolling of hot-spot areas and disruption visits to known offenders. This work has resulted in over 60 persons being either arrested or reported for offences and 20 vehicles being seized. This work will resume in September / October. ~~with some focus being put into seizure of dogs from coursers to limit future activity.~~
- 4.5 The force response to illegal raves is now predominantly focussed on gathering intelligence to prevent occurrence rather than managing the fall out. This work proved very successful during the recent Strawberry Fair in Cambridge, whereby Operation Screwdriver was implemented on the run up to the event. Visits to persons with previous rave involvement were carried out by RCT, liaison was maintained with Landowners and patrols conducted throughout the event. No illegal raves occurred in the county during this weekend. This model is now activated out in response to any relevant intelligence.
- 4.6 RCT has three specialist Wildlife Crime officers who have specific training and expertise around the more unique wildlife crime. Investigations have been conducted around fish poaching, raptor poisoning, illegal bird capture, deer poaching, night hawking and even the sale of crocodile meat. The officers work in partnership with many other agencies and now have specialist crime scene investigation support from collaborated CSI services based in Bedfordshire.
- 4.7 A working group has been established around straw stack arson, which causes significant financial loss to landowners and energy companies each year. The group include RCT members and it has a remit for both strategic and tactical action in tackling this type of crime. The group is chaired by Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service staff.
- 4.8 Focus on certain individuals is key to tackling rural and travelling crime effectively. RCT and wider CIB have conducted a significant amount of search warrants at rural locations and sites in response to drug production, supply, theft and more serious organised crime. Examples of this type of work being crucial, include the recent arrest and sentencing of a ~~travelling~~ criminal for an aggravated rural burglary, involving the theft of firearms. This same person had also been reported for hare coursing offences in the past. He and three associates received sentences of up to thirteen years for their involvement in the crime. Another significant example is the detection of a number of ATM thefts by ~~travelling~~ criminals which has resulted in three recent findings of guilty at court. It is clear that these individuals were involved in many strands of organised rural crime.

4.9 Community reassurance and crime prevention is delivered by the RCT PCSO working together with Countryside Watch members and the District Crime Reduction Officers.

5. Benefits

5.1 The new structure has increased the amount of officers with rural crime responsibility. In addition the whole Tactical Team (32 officers) is made available to tackle a rural crime issue, should it be highlighted and prioritised at the fortnightly force tasking or operational review meetings.

5.2 It has provided improved resilience and flexibility ensuring that core rural crime business can be tackled effectively and that best use is made of organisational resources at all times, despite seasonal crime trends.

5.3 Rural crime response capability has increased from core times of 0800-1600 to 0800-0200hrs. In addition a 24 / 7 contact within the CIB desk function exists.

5.4 Existing rural partnership and community liaison has been maintained by the PCSO post holder in partnership with Countryside Watch. Accountability is maintained via the RCAG and Eastern Region Rural Crime meeting structure. Team performance indicators measure activity.

6. Recommendations

6.1 This paper is submitted for information and noting by the Board.

Rural Crime Team (Appendix A)

