

## Aberystwyth University

### *Final report to Dyfed-Powys Police*

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## **Final report to Dyfed-Powys Police – Farm and Rural Crime**

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David Dowell (St. Andrews University)

### **Executive Summary:**

This report focuses on rural and farm crime in the Dyfed-Powys policing area and follows a remit set out in the Terms of Reference (See Appendix A) to address specific needs of Dyfed-Powys Police (DPP) surrounding the recording and investigation of farm and rural crime. Specifically, this was in relation to engagement, service delivery, specialist resources (including personnel) and future delivery of the rural crime strategy. A questionnaire was developed in consultation with key stakeholders from DPP to reflect on key issues: personal experiences of crime, farm related crime in the area and police attitudes and responses to farm crime. The survey was aimed at farmers and promoted through a number of channels, including the DPP and farming unions. A total of 96 people (16 Welsh speakers) from the farming community responded either online or through public engagement events. Key findings suggest that whilst there was general satisfaction with DPP, that there was a perception that the investigation and prosecution of farm and rural crime was not being adequately and/or appropriately resourced. Initiatives modelled on other force areas, such as dedicated rural crime officers with specialist knowledge were welcomed.

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## **Introduction and Background to the Study**

One of the election pledges for the Police and Crime Commissioner Dafydd Llywelyn was to provide an evidence-based policing strategy for the Dyfed-Powys Police Force. In commissioning this survey, Mr. Llywelyn stated: “Dyfed Powys Police is the most rural of Police Forces and is the largest geographical Force area across Wales and England. We have many disparate rural communities and therefore we are committed to fully understanding the needs and requirements of all groups, communities and business sectors.” In order to address these important issues, this survey will support Dyfed Powys Police in: “[...] understanding the unique pressures facing these rural areas and in particular the crime and antisocial behaviour affecting agriculture and will allow us to deliver services that meets these demands efficiently. As the Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys, I am committed to regularly engaging with all communities utilising the knowledge and skills within local universities to support this and I encourage people to take part in order to inform us of the issues.” This survey aims to deliver an informed response to this call and additional issues set out in the terms of reference (see Appendix A).

In support, Superintendent Robyn Mason, the Rural Crime Strategic Lead for Dyfed Powys Police, highlighted: “Dyfed Powys Police are fully supportive of this survey. We are always looking for ways to improve our service to our rural communities and look forward to reading the results. This review is timely in that we are currently reviewing our Rural Policing Strategy. The findings of this survey will assist that review.” After some high profile, farm crime cases in the Dyfed-Powys region and concerns raised by the Farming Unions, this report was commissioned by the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Police and Crime Commissioner set a task to understand the extent of farm crime with the locality and to gather opinions on current policing within the region of Dyfed-Powys. It was deemed important that this report was independent from the police. The findings will inform new initiatives being developed by Dyfed-Powys Police to tackle rural crime and is supported by the farming Unions.

## **Background Literature**

Estimates of the cost of farm related crime to the UK consistently near £40m annually; these figures are also skewed towards insurable losses and don't include associated rural and environmental crime. Whilst there have been a number of studies conducted into farm and rural crime - ranging from official crime data summaries to professional reports and academic papers - the general understanding of the extent, perpetrators and appropriate responses remain limited. The British Crime Survey includes a range of questions on rural crime alongside regional analysis of wider crime categories. In addition, the ONS publishes a summary report annually on Rural Crime Statistics. However, with much of the crime recorded by farms is generally grouped under commercial victimisation (specific rules exist for classifying property usage on farms), estimates remain equivocal. For example, some crime may be recorded under 'other theft' such as the trade in scrap metal, including farm gates and

machinery. Similar patterns emerge for other crime categories, including criminal damage and vehicle theft. Specific police forces gather micro level data and occasionally publish extensive crime prevention advice; other initiatives such as the National Rural Crime Network, are semi-official organisations funded by individual police forces, the Home Office and private companies with the aim of getting greater recognition of farm and rural crime generally. The driving aim of the government and private organisations is to address farm and rural crime through increased reporting and more robust statistics to increase the evidence base in this area.

Some of the widest statistical data is generated by insurance companies and farming unions. The 2017 NFU Rural Crime Report is regarded as one of the most comprehensive estimates of the nature and extent of rural crime, suggesting that costs to the UK economy of £40m annually; the North-east of England is worst hit (£7.3m) and Wales (£1.3m) slightly behind Scotland (£1.6m). However, it must be acknowledged that these are largely unweighted figures based on claims data and take no account of demographics and land area. The biggest categories are theft of agricultural vehicles (£5.4m), 4x4s and ATVs (£4.1m) and livestock (£2.2m). Only Wales recorded an increase in sheep theft whereas other UK regions reported a decline. Other organisations such as the Countryside Alliance regularly document farm crime trends alongside wider rural issues such as hunting and open access.

Academic literature – principally from Criminology – has long been seen to favour urban representations of crime over rural issues (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy, 2008). In particular, the focus on rural crime has been dominated with uncovering the hidden nature of criminality through the underreporting of criminal events and the wider community and contextual nature of these activities (Barclay, Donnermeyer, and Jobes, 2004). Our image of the countryside as a place of crime is at odds with the ‘rural idyll’ (Jones, 2008). The focus here, however, is primarily on agricultural crime and a number of victimisation surveys have shown that this form of crime is extensive and involves large financial losses to farmers (Barclay and Donnermeyer, 2011). On average, 25% of farms will experience theft of machinery, equipment and livestock every year; domestic burglaries by nearly 1 in 10 – far in excess of urban rates. The juxtaposition between countryside as a place of business and recreation is seen to create situations where opportunistic crime can flourish and organised crime be concealed as legitimate leisure activities. Many under-researched topics linked to rural areas and agriculture include wildlife crime, environmental protection, the food chain and terrorist training and bio-terrorism, amongst others.

The main limitation of gauging the extent of rural and farm crime is that recording and statistics are at best unreliable. The most accepted estimates come from insurance reporting, but these are biased in terms of those where a recoverable loss is involved. Many crimes may go undetected or else not reported due to a lack of confidence in police responses or community pressures to deal with issues locally. Hence, the current survey aims to provide some specific data on the nature of farm crime in the DPP area and how interactions

with the police can be improved to address these shortcomings and advise on future directions for the overall rural crime strategy in the DPP force area.

## **Survey Methodology**

The aim of the study was to capture a representative sample of farmers in the DPP area to provide cross-sectional data on the extent of rural crime and the police responses/general attitudes towards the authorities. The survey was informed by discussions with Police officers working in the rural locations of Dyfed-Powys. The survey instrument (See Appendix B) was created and hosted in an online portal, which allowed participants to access it remotely via a link, using an iPad during consultation events (e.g. Royal Welsh Show) or else completed on paper and the results entered into the system. The survey was divided into three main sections:

1. Demographics (incl. farm type) and experience of crime;
2. Opinions about farm related crime in the area;
3. Perceptions regarding police attitudes to farm crime.

The survey spanned an 8 week period in June-July 2017 and was advertised through multiple channels, including the DPP website, farming unions websites and member newsletters, Aberystwyth University press releases and social media, and BBC Wales news and radio programmes. In addition, officers from DPP at the Royal Welsh show surveyed many farmers visiting their stand. A total of 96 people completed the survey; 16 were in Welsh and the remaining 80 in English. The report is further informed by documentary evidence of good practice from other police forces.

## **Findings**

The total number of people whom had experienced a criminal event on their property was around 50% of the sample. Farm machinery was the largest category of crime reported in the survey (approx. 50% of total) followed by livestock theft (25%). Other examples included theft of gates, beehives and tools; criminal damage (dogs killing sheep and illegal hunting) were also recorded. Around 90% of offences were purportedly reported to the police and over half responded to say they were satisfied by the response from the police. However, the 40+% that were not happy with the way police dealt with their criminal experience(s) cited an apparent lack of interest and slow response times as the main features for their lack of approval. Nearly 90% of respondents reported that there was no conviction following the incidents reported. General trust in the police appeared to be good and perceptions of safety in the general area were also high. There also appeared to be a high level of community cohesion and social interaction. Appraisals of where the source of crime had originated were mixed; clearly the low clear-up rate meant that many were unsure, but there appeared to be a mixture of low-level 'local' crime and larger-scale organised crime from outside the area.

More detailed analysis of the data indicated some broad trends associated with the type and level of crime experienced in the DPP force area and some tentative assessments regarding the likely perpetrators. Of the 47% of participants had been victims of farm business crime:

- 91% of victims *reported* the crime
- 49% of victims indicated *machinery* was the primary criminal target
- 30% of victims indicate *stock* was the primary criminal target
- 33% of victims felt the crime was committed by a *local person*

It is clear from the [self-report] figures that machinery theft was the main type of farm crime experienced and that 2/3 of those experiencing theft believing it to be originating from outside the local area.

Trust in the police was good and comparing those whom had been a victim of crime indicated *greater* trust in both the police and criminal justice system than those who hadn't experienced criminal events. In addition, over half (54%) of the sample were satisfied with the police generally; in order to improve general satisfaction with the police, 62% suggested the appointment of dedicated farm officers and 57% wanted farm crime to be taken more seriously.

However, whilst there were some positive findings to report, these should also be interpreted in light of wider crime reporting trends. As noted, farm crime is seldom identified as a separate phenomenon, but rather mixed with business and rural crime figures. If we take some example measures from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), we can see that trust in the police amongst farmers in the current sample was 64% compared to a national average of 75% for rural respondents. Similarly, whilst rural crime is generally low and only 23% of people feel crime is on the rise, the sample of farmers here suggest that 85% believe it to be increasing. Finally, whether victims of crime are satisfied with the police (73% nationally) is far greater than the 54% of victim's satisfaction in the DPP sample. The caveat of rural vs. farm crime should be restated here and potential opportunities for specific data recording at force level of farm related crime is essential to accurately compare these groups. Overall, the perception is that interactions with the police were generally positive, but whilst the reporting of farm crime is high the chances of successful prosecution were low. Anecdotally, comments made during the survey open-ended questions implicate slow response times, a failure to consider local intelligence and lack of evidence collection as causes for concern amongst farmers whom have reported farm crime.

## **Discussion and Key Issues**

The main finding supported by the data was that although general satisfaction with the police as an organisation was high, the perception of the way in which reports of farm crime were actually dealt with was poor. This appeared to be a reaction to various issues, but the most cited were slow response times, lack of realistic apprehension/prosecution and general disinterest in rural crime. These responses for the DPP area mirror the issues reported in the professional and

academic literature on the subject. A major feature of responding to crime trends is being able to establish key relationships with stakeholders in order to gather reliable and accurate data. Alongside creating avenues whereby farmers would be more willing to report crime (not just for insurance purposes, for example) might be to develop dedicated flags for farm specific crime. Current practices see this unique data being mixed up with residential and commercial surveys, confounding the problem further. Without accurate information, the allocation of resources will be misappropriated.

Further to the reporting and recording issues, there was some suggestion that the police were ill-equipped to deal with farm crime. In contrast to the resources which have been allocated to, for example, fraud and internet crime, farm crime as a specialist 'activity' is vastly under resourced. Much of the larger-scale crime – theft of farm machinery and livestock – is not opportunistic and requires specialist knowledge and contacts in order to transport and dispose of the illegitimate goods. Farmers appear to be willing to invest in CCTV and join 'Farm Watch' initiatives, but without seeing positive results then these are largely futile and lack any momentum in creating a sense of cohesion between the farming community and police.

Police responses to farm and rural crime, however, are improving; Hertfordshire was the first police force in England to pioneer the rural special constable initiative in 2009. Many forces, for example, North Wales, North Yorkshire and Devon and Cornwall amongst others, now run well-publicised and highly effective rural policing teams. Dorset police recently achieved national coverage for their rural policing initiative through a privately donated tractor complete with police livery. Much of the focus of these campaigns is to raise awareness and increase reporting; modern intelligence led policing requires accurate data of prevalence and patterns to be effective. Hence, the use of 'police' tractors at shows, dedicated social media presence and wider links with insurance companies and research facilities all help to raise awareness of the nature and extent of rural crime. As discussed above, the focus within criminology on the urban environment has recently experienced a shift as we become more aware of the environment, source of our food and leisure activities linked to rural communities. Hence, farm and rural crime is deserved of more attention and due to the specific issues associated with the context of these activities requires specialist input, in much the same way that financial and drug related crime is resourced.

Discussions with rural police officers had raised several concerns, most notably the financial resources available: "we haven't got a bottomless pit of money and if we can't invest in those areas are we as a police service setting ourselves up to fail". Others drawing on personal experience felt that officers with improved knowledge of farming would more likely receive a better response within the rural communities. In addition, observations from other police forces highlighted the increased use of social media; not specifically for reporting crime, but more to facilitate engagement with hard to reach communities. Officers did raise concerns of the resource requirements of staffing such media tools.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

It is important to recognise that any survey – particularly cross-sectional and/or self-report – can contain biases in respects to the representativeness of the sample, reliability and applicability of measuring instruments and the objectivity of the respondents. Whilst every effort was made to provide a wide-range of avenues for respondents to complete the survey, it is noted that there was a potential overrepresentation of respondents whom had both been victims of farm related crime (47%) and 9 out of 10 of these had reported these instances to the police. Compared to national rates for reporting crimes (approx. 38% in rural samples), these figures appear high and may well indicate that there was some latent motivation for completing the survey. Cross tabulation of these results with force data on recorded farm crime and wider national/comparison areas would also be useful in providing some context to this data.

The nature of the survey methodology meant that the main data analysed was quantitative in nature; there were, however, a large number of free-text comments that are worthy of additional analysis. We have alluded to some of the examples reported here, but any recommendations and future policy shaping would be mindful of specific responses to some of the questions. In particular, there were some suggestions that organised crime and/or offenders travelling into specific areas were responsible for much of the criminal enterprise in the DPP force area. Again, without reliable data to support these conclusions then it remains to be seen how such crimes should be targeted and investigated.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Farm and associated rural crime is a broad category and in the absence of supporting data, any conclusions from this report are made in light of the limitations of the methodology and sample surveyed. However, it appears that there was some level of dissatisfaction in the way the police responded to reports of farm crime. In particular, over a third of respondents would have liked to see the introduction of dedicated farm crime officers and a similar percentage simply requested that farm crime be ‘taken more seriously’. Many were aware of neighbouring forces (e.g. Avon and Somerset and North Wales) having a more focused response to farm crime; clearly these are models which could be emulated and the wider UK-wide network of rural crime prevention tapped into.

In order to improve evidence of the extent of farm and rural crime a commonality of reporting should be developed. Resource allocation and police budgets are an issue however; there are opportunities to work smarter. One solution would be to ensure that dedicated rural officers are present at rural events such as livestock markets and shows. In addition to this, Young Farmers Clubs could be used as a means of not only discussing farming issues, but also connecting with young people within the region. Social media sites are a powerful communication tool; however, 24hr staffing of these sites is not practical or necessarily efficient and we suggest informing the public of when there is a dedicated rural crime officer available. Discussions with the police raised many issues of the reporting of rural and farm crime and many of the



recommendations here have already been adopted into the Rural Crime Strategy document for 2017 (Dyfed-Powys Police, 2017). Evaluations of the effectiveness of these new initiatives will provide evidence that these evidence-based approaches are effective in tackling even smaller scale community policing issues alongside more serious and organised crime in the area.

## References

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## Appendix A – Terms of Reference



### Terms of Reference for Review of Rural Policing and Wildlife Crime

#### Background

With the development of an updated Rural Policing Strategy a review is needed of how Heddlu Dyfed Powys deal with rural and wildlife crime and incidents; including what engagement we have, what specialist knowledge or resources are available to us, what is national best practice and what we need to deliver the best possible service now and in the future in line with the Police and Crime Delivery Plan.

#### Aim

To maximise the opportunity to ensure that Heddlu Dyfed Powys Police has an effective Rural Policing Strategy and Delivery Plan which compliments the Police and Crime Plan 2017 – 2021 and associated Delivery Plan. This review will need to take into account the changing types of crime and vulnerability, the isolation found in rural communities, the changes to the way we deliver Neighbourhood Policing and national best practice.

- The review should establish the current picture across the organisation, level of training, understanding and expertise. Areas of strength and areas of development within the current policing structure.
- The review should look to identify an effective force operating model, as well as future opportunities to support force priority areas.
- The review should have due regard to feedback from staff.
- The review should establish national best practice and look to see how they could be adopted within Heddlu Dyfed Powys Police.
- The review should identify methods of measuring progress towards the goals set out in the Delivery Plan.

#### Outcomes sought

- Interim report to be submitted by 01/05/17 to include initial findings and whether T.O.R. remains fit for purpose.
- Briefing to be conducted with Supt Mason before 24/05/17 and to allow any amendments to be made prior final submission before 01/06/17.
- Full report to be submitted by 01/06/17. To include recommendations, costs associated with recommendations and a draft timetable for implementation of recommendations if agreed.

**Lead Officer**

The review will be overseen by Chief Inspector Richard Hopkin who will report direct to Superintendent Robyn Mason. Insp Paul Bonning and T/Insp Matthew Howells will assist in the collation of information to inform the review.

**Review Governance Structure**

- Strategic Lead - Superintendent Robyn Mason.
- Operational Lead - Chief Inspector Richard Hopkin.