Tackling Rural Crime in Thames Valley

Rural Crime and its effect on the rural economy is a key priority within the Police & Crime Commissioner’s Policing Plan and the Thames Valley Police 2013/14 Delivery Plan.

The following briefing details the development of existing work and new tactics introduced to improve the rural community’s confidence in Thames Valley Police’s approach to preventing, responding to and investigating rural crime.

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) in rural areas

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) involves static CCTV cameras reading and recording vehicle registration plates automatically as vehicles pass beneath them. This information is compared against a national database which contains many thousands of vehicle details – in particular those that are known to the police. The network also allows investigators the opportunity to interrogate recent activity to assist in identifying and ultimately catching offenders.

A further twenty two sites were selected in rural locations to extend TVP’s ANPR Network at a cost of £270,000.00. Installation is already underway which will see the new cameras on-line in 2013/14.

On average ANPR directly contributes to between 50 and 60 arrests per month. The most recent rural crime related activation concerned two vehicles suspected to be involved with hare coursing.

Initial response and grading of rural crime

In July 2013, we introduced a revised definition for rural crime that ensures offences that target or affect the rural economy attract greater scrutiny and an improved response. Offences committed on farms, involving agricultural buildings, vehicles, tools, fuel or livestock will, in every case, result in Police or PCSO attendance.

Improving the investigation of rural crimes

To improve the investigation and oversight of rural crimes, all offences are brought to the attention of the Local Police Area (LPA) Commander each morning at their Daily Management Meeting (DMM). This allows the Commander to remain briefed on all rural crimes, address any rural community impact or risk and to ensure investigations are promptly allocated and rigorously pursued.

Police Operations, Target Hardening and Enforcement

A high profile series of 20 operations, publicised externally as “100 Days of Action”, known internally as Operation Ranger, commenced on 22nd July. Each of our 10 rural LPAs identified 5 days during the summer and 5 during the winter to carry out a wide variety of engagement and enforcement activities. A tactical menu of options for tackling rural crime was created to assist them in their planning.

Ongoing coverage of the activity undertaken so far can be found on our internet blog: http://tvp100daysofaction.blogspot.co.uk/. This has received over 4000 hits to date.
Crime Prevention and Agricultural Vehicle Marking

Crime Prevention and Reduction Advisors (CPRAs) have provided comprehensive support to rural police areas during the Op Ranger ‘100 days of action’. Repeat victims and Farms in higher risk areas receive bespoke farm security assessments. The Crime Prevention guidance provided through the Thames Valley Police and Country Watch Web Site has also been significantly updated and enhanced.

TVP has continued to work closely with Datatag in the promotion of CESAR vehicle property marking. An additional £5000 has been made available this financial year for the ongoing discounting of CESAR kits to those living in the Thames Valley. The continuing success of the scheme, achieved through promotion by our Neighborhood Policing Teams and partners, has seen a further 138 vehicles fitted with the system so far this year.

Thames Valley Police won a Datatag award this year at the first national Plantworx (Construction Equipment Association) show for the force’s outstanding commitment to proactive Policing to combat construction and agricultural equipment theft.

Rural Special Constables

Police areas have already aligned their Special Constables to rural Neighbourhood Teams and we are currently creating an online rural crime training package to further develop the specialist skills and knowledge of the Special Constabulary which will be available from November. We are also developing Special Constable Bike Teams and examining the possibilities of Special Constables on horseback to police rural communities.

Increase the membership and use of TV Alerts in rural communities

Neighbourhood Policing Teams have been able to draw upon new and enhanced Country Watch branded resources to assist their engagement with and provide an improved service to the rural community – e.g. at rural events & country shows.

The rural specific portal www.Thamesvalleycountrywatch.com website was launched in February and is subject of ongoing development.

Since the commencement of Op RANGER in July an additional 10,000 people have been signed up to TV Alerts (an e-mail and/or text information service that shares intelligence and information with the public) in rural communities.

Training

In order to improve the awareness, knowledge and expertise in rural crime amongst call handling teams, 37 separate training sessions were conducted with staff from our Control Room and Enquiry Department, supported by presenters from our rural crime partnerships.
In June, a rural crime conference was held at Drayton Park. Attendees included Police Commanders and members of Neighbourhood Policing Teams who were briefed on the new definition and equipped with new skills and knowledge to tackle rural crime and to more effectively engage with our rural communities. Several of our rural partners provided presentations based on their respective fields of expertise.

Building on our commitment to deal more effectively with wildlife crime, a further 9 officers have been nominated by their police areas to attend the Wildlife Crime course in April 2014. This will increase our establishment of Wildlife Crime Officers to 13.

**Hare Coursing & Poaching 2012-2013**

There were 23 incidents recorded on CEDAR (Thames Valley crime recording system) as non-recordable crimes relating to hare coursing and poaching (compared to 29 last year) and 360 incidents (compared to 299 last year), opened on Command and Control (computer based resourcing system used to command and allocate resources to incidents) with a sub-classification of hare coursing for the period 19/09/12 to 19/09/13.

The figures suggest an under recording of crime. To assist officers in tackling hare coursing and poaching, the ‘Hare Coursing Officers Guide’ has been updated this year along with an online rural crime training package.

**Illegal Raves**

Since January 2013 there has been 23 raves reported which is a fall by 10 on the previous year. There is a noticeable drop in Oxfordshire and Milton Keynes Areas.

Operation Robust is the force wide response to unlicensed music events/raves. Last year this Operation was instigated on an adhoc but intelligence lead basis. This year it was pre-planned for every Saturday night from April through to the end of September.

**Metal Theft**

Metal theft is a force and national priority with all police services completing operations targeting Scrap Metal Dealers, Waste Carriers and those involved in the theft of metals (infrastructure and non-infrastructure).

Thames Valley Police’s Operation Precious team continue their daily activity visiting scrap yards across Thames Valley and delivering training to neighbourhood teams as well as working with other agencies. They also conduct operations involving mobile collectors of scrap metal.

In the past 12 months metal theft has fallen by approximately 46% from 3922 offences in 2011/12 to 2213 offences in 2012/2013.

**Bovine TB – Badger Cull**
The badger cull commenced in Avon & Somerset on 27th August and in Gloucestershire on 3rd September. Each cull is scheduled to last for a six week period.

The cull is progressing with the most up to date information indicating that a maximum of 200 protestors (low level, mainly middle England) are locating themselves around the Gloucester area. There have been 10 arrests so far, mainly for Aggravated Trespass.

We still have the same number of high profile people and properties in TVP all of whom were visited by the Oxford Support Team prior to the start of the cull. We have not received any reports of intimidation or any reported offences at any of the locations.

**Green Yard Scheme**

To tackle illegal ‘Fly Grazing’ Operation Rosette, Thames Valley’s Green Yard scheme, commenced in April and by July had successfully removed three horses and recovered costs where appropriate. Traditionally we receive more reports of stray or unlawfully grazed horses during the autumn / winter and therefore expect our attendance and recovery to increase in the last two quarters of the year.

**Fox Hunting**

In the past 12 months, sixty eight hunts were reported to the police with forty two resulting in police attendance. None of those attended resulted in any formal prosecution although one still remains pending.