

# Rural Affairs Strategy

*Strengthening safe and prosperous communities*

2018 - 2021





# I. Background

- 1.1 Farming Minister George Eustice said: “Food and farming is our largest industry in this country, it is worth over £108bn a year – bigger than aerospace and automotives put together. It is a huge industry.” (Sep 2016, Westminster - Back British Farming Day)
- 1.2 Wildlife Crime and Rural Affairs form a significant part of policing. The National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) portfolio ‘Wildlife Crime and Rural Affairs’ is led by senior police officers who work in conjunction with expert partners. This strategy is focussed on Rural Affairs whilst having commonality with some aspects of the Wildlife Crime Strategy 2018-2021.
- 1.3 The types of rural crimes seen across the UK vary from all types of farm crime to fly tipping. Police forces also face regional and local variations in rural crime. According to the NFU Mutual Rural Crime Report 2017, “The rise in rural crime has come about due to two main factors. Social and economic change has seen the number of farms fall and close-knit communities collapse. Modern transport links now enable thieves to steal farm machinery and move it into mainland Europe in a matter of hours”.

The report highlights some emerging trends as:

- Being watched or ‘staked out’ is the biggest concern for people living in the countryside
- Ongoing livestock theft is raising concerns that stock is being stolen for slaughter and processing outside regulated abattoirs before illegally entering the food chain
- Thieves are cloning the identities of large, expensive tractors to make them easier to sell and harder to detect
- Small and older tractors are being targeted by organised gangs for export to developing countries
- Since Land Rover ended production of its Defender, the iconic farm vehicle has become an even bigger target for thieves

NFU Mutual Rural Crime Report 2017

<https://www.nfumutual.co.uk/news-and-stories/rural-crime-report-2017/>

NFU Combatting Rural Crime

<https://www.nfuonline.com/cross-sector/rural-affairs/rural-affairs-rh-panel/nfu-report-lays-bare-true-costs-of-rural-crime/>

- 1.4 The extent of the cost of rural crime is outlined in the 2017 NFU Mutual Rural Crime report which identifies the insurance claim cost in 2016 to be £39.2m, £5.4m of this cost is identified as Agricultural Vehicle Theft alone. Crimes such as livestock theft also have a significant cost of £2.2m in the same year.
- 1.5 The 2015 National Rural Crime Survey was answered by 17000 people living and working in rural communities. It suggested the cost of rural crime to be significantly higher than previously identified, stating that the true cost of rural crime could exceed £800m. The key findings from this survey described the financial impact of crime on the rural economy equates to £200 for every household in the countryside and an average cost to rural households, who are victims of crime, of £2500 and £4100 for rural businesses. It also describes the fear of crime as increasing and a low satisfaction rate of police performance in rural areas. Crime in these areas is underreported which affects the true understanding of the extent crimes.

NRCN report: The True Cost of Crime in Rural Areas 2015  
<http://www.nationalruralcrimenetwork.net/research/internal/national-rural-crimes-survey-2015/>

*“I was afraid, yes. I wake up every night at 1:30am and don’t go to sleep again until 4am, because that’s when they come.” – Jeremy Scott, an arable farmer from Kent, who sustained serious injuries after defending his property from four masked individuals breaking into his farm. Mr Scott’s son said “It seems that these people operate with absolute impunity. There’s almost no neighbour, that we have, who hasn’t been broken into.”*

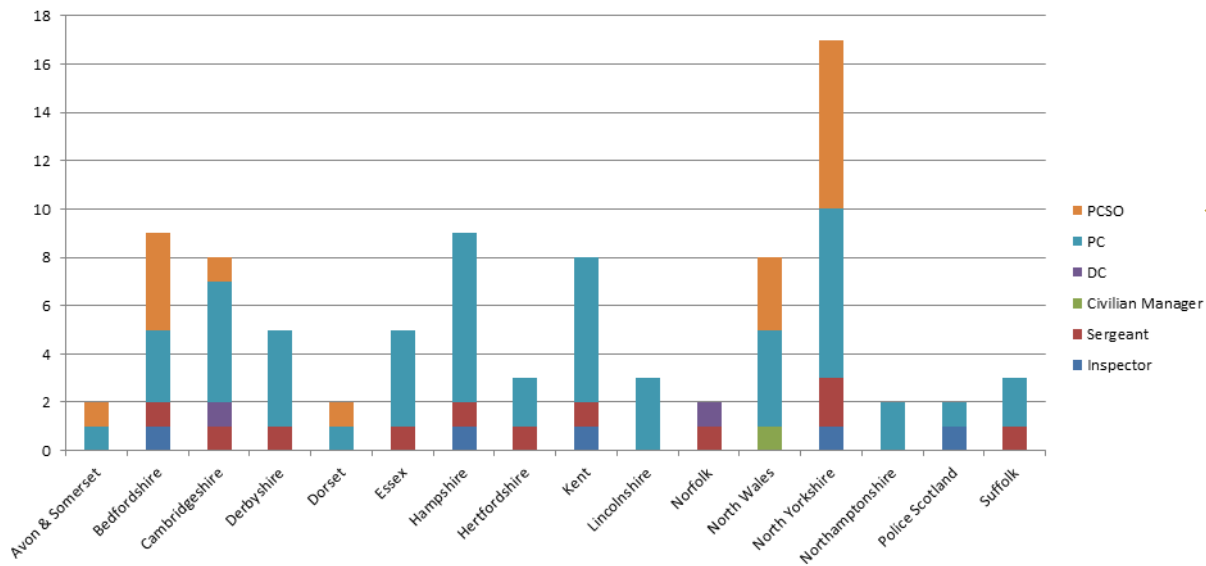
**(National Farmers Union, 2017)**

<https://youtu.be/Jddq8SjRejE>

## 2. Initial research, current situation

- 2.1 This initial assessment has been completed in two ways. Firstly, a benchmarking survey of police forces\* that identified the current environment. Secondly, a series of workshops with police practitioners and partner organisations were held in order to gauge opinions on what is important to rural communities, a view on current services and to generate ideas for improvement. The survey and workshops' results were added to other survey and academic work to provide a rounded picture and the start point for development work.
- 2.2 In October 2017, a benchmarking survey was undertaken to better understand the environment and current investment into rural policing across the UK. Whilst appreciating that all rural areas of UK will be covered by police patrols, the exercise also focused on understanding the extent of dedicated rural crime police resources dealing with bespoke rural crimes.
- 2.3 The benchmarking survey used a framework, already adopted in policing, that is used to build new (or reinforce current) services by assessing:
- Capacity
  - Contributions
  - Capabilities
  - Consistency
  - Connectivity
- 2.4 The results of the benchmarking survey of police forces across the UK, identified a range of approaches to resourcing the policing of rural communities and addressing rural crime. This ranged from dedicated rural crime teams and resources to treating rural crime as business as usual. Whilst it appears that forces can readily recruit into existing bespoke rural teams, there are opportunities to improve further through greater data collection and establishing a robust evidence base, agreeing national standards relating to accredited training, policies, procedures and use of resources.
- 2.5 Benchmarking results as of October 2017 illustrate the mixture of solutions current adopted. Of the 53 forces:
- 26 police forces across the UK have a dedicated resource to tackling rural crime, 16 of these are dedicated rural crime teams consisting of two or more full time police officers (see Table 1), five forces have one full time police officer who is dedicated to rural crime
  - 11 police forces across the UK have at least one member of police staff dedicated to combat rural crime
  - 29 police forces utilise volunteers to fight rural crime, 13 of these dedicate Special Constables to fighting rural crime
  - 43 police forces across the UK (including non-Home Office forces) have a wildlife crime capability
  - 12 of 21 teams with a dedicated police officer resource provide a level of training to dedicated rural officers
  - Of all the forces that don't have a dedicated rural crime team, none of them have plans to introduce one
- 2.6 The citizen's role in policing continues to be as vital in modern policing. Embracing and developing 'citizens in policing' provides an excellent opportunity to not only increase additional capabilities, but also to build social capital and ensure that the service continues to successfully police with our communities' consent. The benchmarking exercise conducted in October 2017 identified the scale of support that Police Support Volunteers (PSVs) and Special Constables provide in a dedicated volunteer resource to fighting rural crime. Table 2 describes the extent of dedicated PSVs and Special Constables tackling rural crime.

*\*The 43 home office forces in England and Wales, the British Transport Police, Civil Nuclear Constabulary, Guernsey, Isle of Man, Jersey, MOD police, RAF Police, Royal Navy Police, Police Service of Northern Ireland and Police Scotland.*



**TABLE I**

Shows the extent of officers dedicated to tackling rural crime

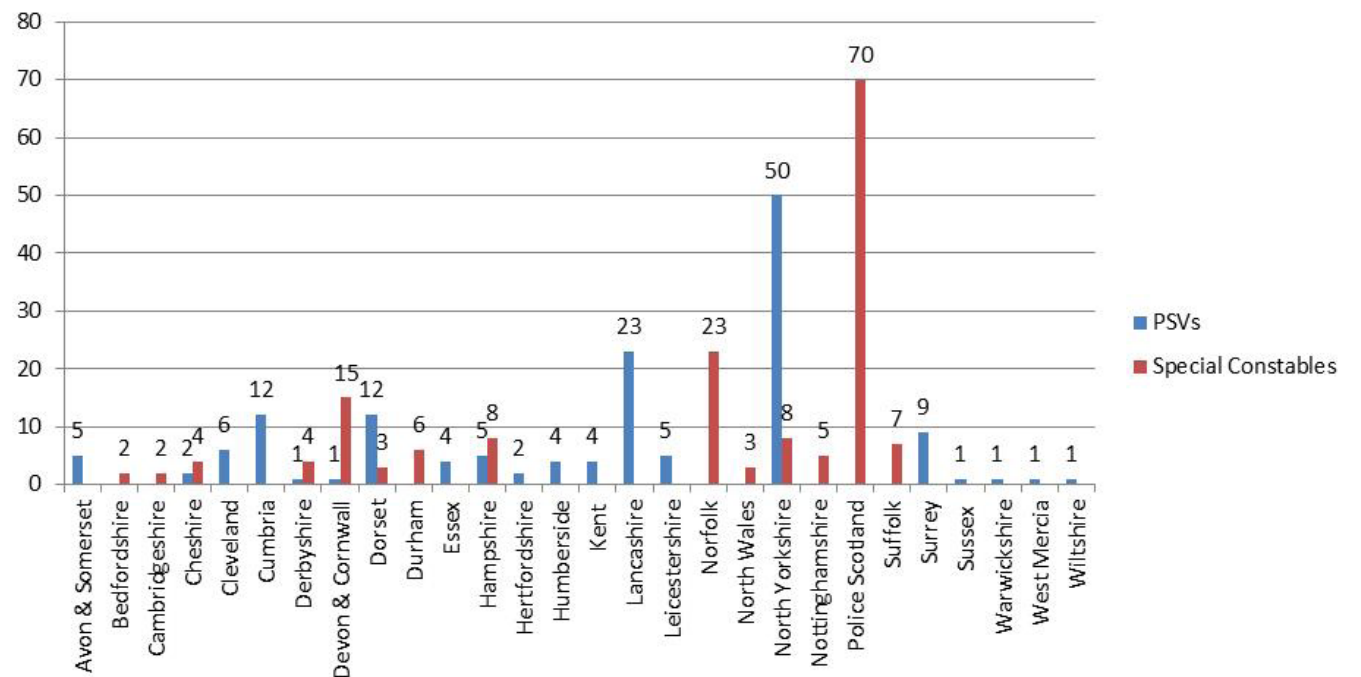
**TABLE 2**

Shows the extent of dedicated PSVs and Special Constables tackling rural crime

PSVs



Specials



## 3. Purpose

3.1 Following engagement in 2017 with a range of stakeholders and police forces, the overall Rural Affairs Strategic Aims were agreed as:

- Safer rural communities
- Enhanced public engagement
- Increased public confidence in the police
- Empowered communities
- Strong partnership working
- Raised profile of rural affairs
- Embedded rural focus into policing culture

3.2 A key to achieving this is by tackling organised criminality. Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) target and exploit rural communities across a range of crime types, for example organised plant theft, livestock theft, burglaries targeting firearms, poaching and hare coursing. Our rural communities are perceived as soft targets with these organised criminals feeling they can go about their criminal activity undetected in large rural areas. Understanding and targeting these OCGs is essential to improving the situation. The police led Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCU) have demonstrated that the 'offenders' involved in organised acquisitive crime such as ATM rip out offences target remote communities, laundering their proceeds through other activities, for example gambling at illegal hare coursing events. Similarly, legally held firearms are normally found secured in rural properties and OCGs have been known to target these addresses in order to filter these firearms through criminal networks to be used in offences such as armed robberies, drug distribution, and kidnap and extortion. Close partnerships with the ROCU network can assist in targeting organised criminality operating in rural locations to the benefit both rural and urban communities. Further to this the development of a national rural crime strategic threat assessment will allow for a better understanding of the challenges rural policing faces.

3.3 The police cannot solve crime problems alone. Engagement with rural communities and partners is essential to enhancing the flow of intelligence, as well as utilising the experience and expertise of the public and partners. Importantly publicising good news stories and positive results of police and partnership action will create an effective and positive cycle. Collectively, this will contribute to strengthening safe and prosperous rural communities.

3.4 Whilst there is a natural cross over between wildlife crime and rural affairs, it is important to note that this strategy is separate to its sister Wildlife Crime Strategy. The Wildlife Crime Strategy was developed from similar consultation exercises which identified the following :

Wildlife crime strategic aims:

- Enhance the conservation of wildlife
- Develop strong partnership and stakeholder working
- Raise public awareness of wildlife crime
- Embed a wildlife focus into policing culture
- Improve recording of wildlife crime
- Improve wildlife crime legislation with proportionate sentences
- Secure future funding for the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCUC)
- Develop information sharing agreements with key stakeholders
- Tackle Organised Crime Groups

What we should be tackling now (wildlife crime):

- Establish senior officer leads for all police forces in tackling wildlife crime and raising internal police awareness
- Continue to develop the briefing notes available on the College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice (APP) to assist investigators and call handlers
- Train and develop the understanding of wildlife crime for members of the Crown Prosecution Service and courts to improve convictions and deliver proportionate sentencing
- Focus on online and dark-web wildlife crime
- Widen the number of recordable wildlife crimes so as to better understand and reflect the range and scale of the portfolio
- Develop academic engagement
- Secure future funding for NWCUC and dedicated wildlife crime officers
- Seek accreditation for national training for PWCOs from the College of Policing
- Develop a clear communication plan
- Strengthen approach to tackling OCGs

## 4. Approach

- 4.1 Through harnessing the passion, expertise, and contributions of partners joined with the policing effort we will:
- Adopt a clear philosophy based upon intelligence led and evidence based approaches, inclusive partnership, infrastructure that drives improvement, prioritisation against greatest risk, effective prevention, engagement and communication
  - Develop plans at the strategic, regional, and local levels
  - Recognise and plan for both operational and organisational requirements
  - Agree priorities and support those through sound infrastructure
  - Incrementally build on successes which are appropriately resourced, tested and assessed for benefits
- 4.2 Achieving the wildlife crime strategic aims will require consideration of, and action against, a considerable range of issues. Therefore, they have been prioritised against the types of offences which cause significant harm to rural communities, their businesses and farming as an industry. Some issues may be part of work already underway in NPCC portfolios such as Roads Policing, Domestic Abuse, Heritage Crime, Serious and Organised Crime others may sit more easily within Rural Affairs. There will also be a continuous link to this portfolio's sister Wildlife Crime Strategy, as well as other intrinsically linked themes such as Heritage and Cultural Property Crime. It is important to recognise that rural crime and anti-social behaviour has an adverse impact on the natural environment and heritage assets found across the UK.

## 5. Priorities

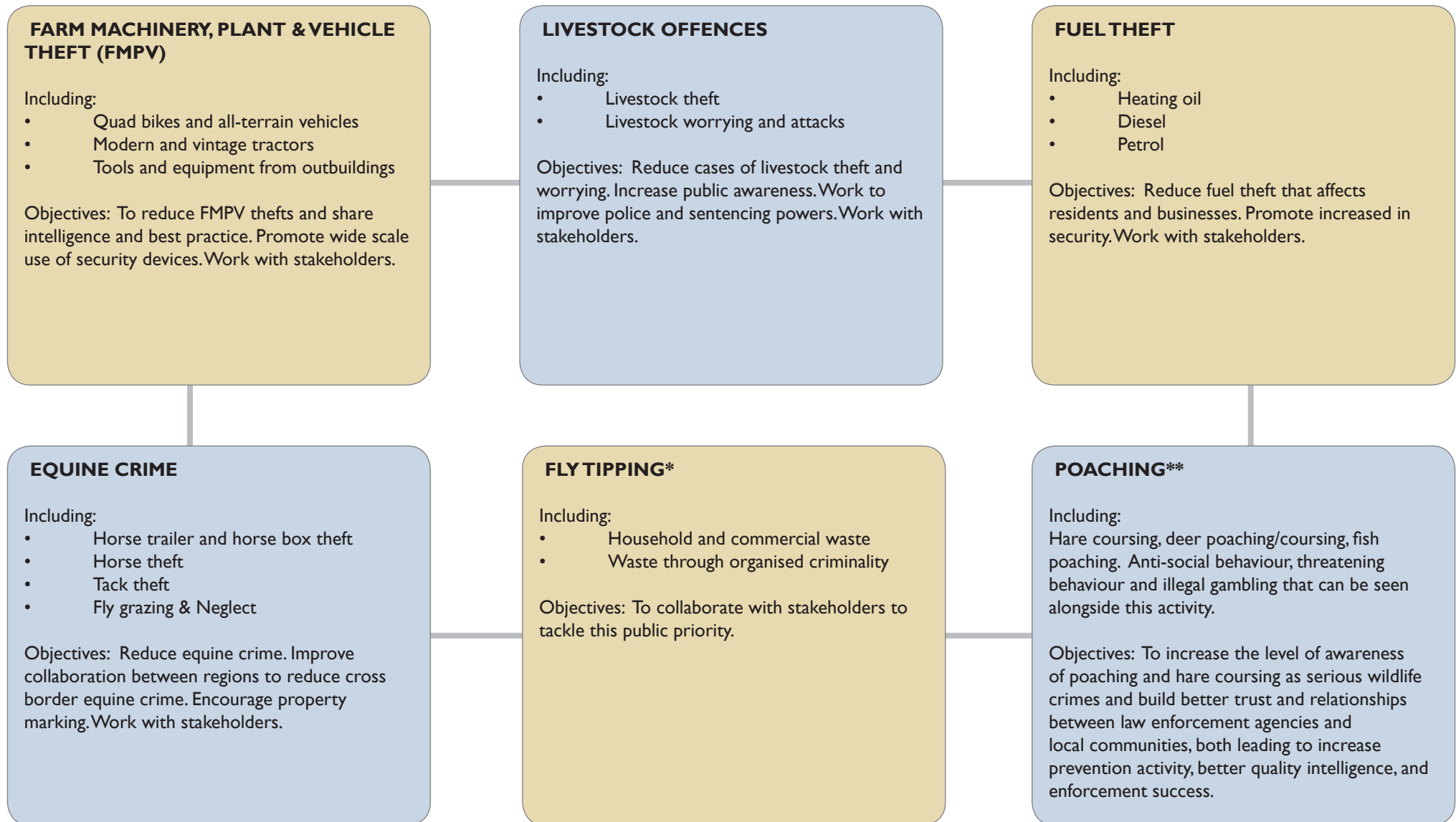
- 5.1 Initial work is based upon findings from the consultation exercises against the agreed service outcomes. It is divided into Operational (5.2) and Organisational (5.4) Priorities.

The Rural Affairs Operational Priorities have been developed through the key issues raised by police and partners. All police forces were invited to identify their local rural crime priorities.

This was compared against existing rural crime claim data from the NFU Mutual Rural Crime Report 2017 and information and accounts detailed in the NFU Combatting Rural Crime Report 2017.

Although crimes such as off road biking, heritage, and fisheries related crime are not included as Operational Priorities they will be managed and addressed regionally and locally. Similarly, emerging crimes such as agrochemical theft will also require review through the CONTEST counter terrorism strategy to ensure an appropriate response locally and regionally.







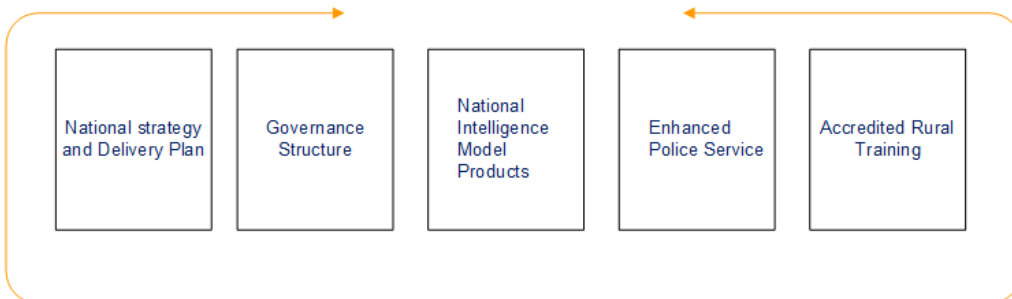
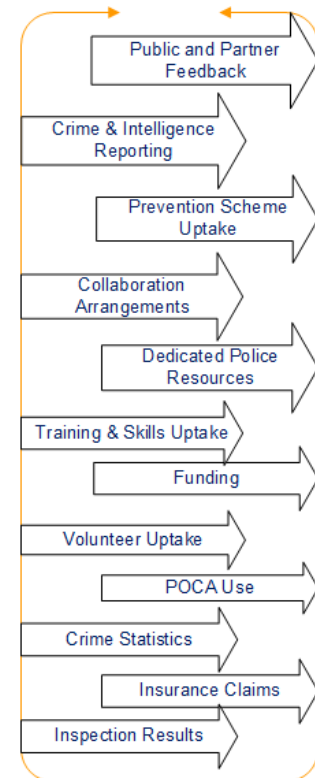
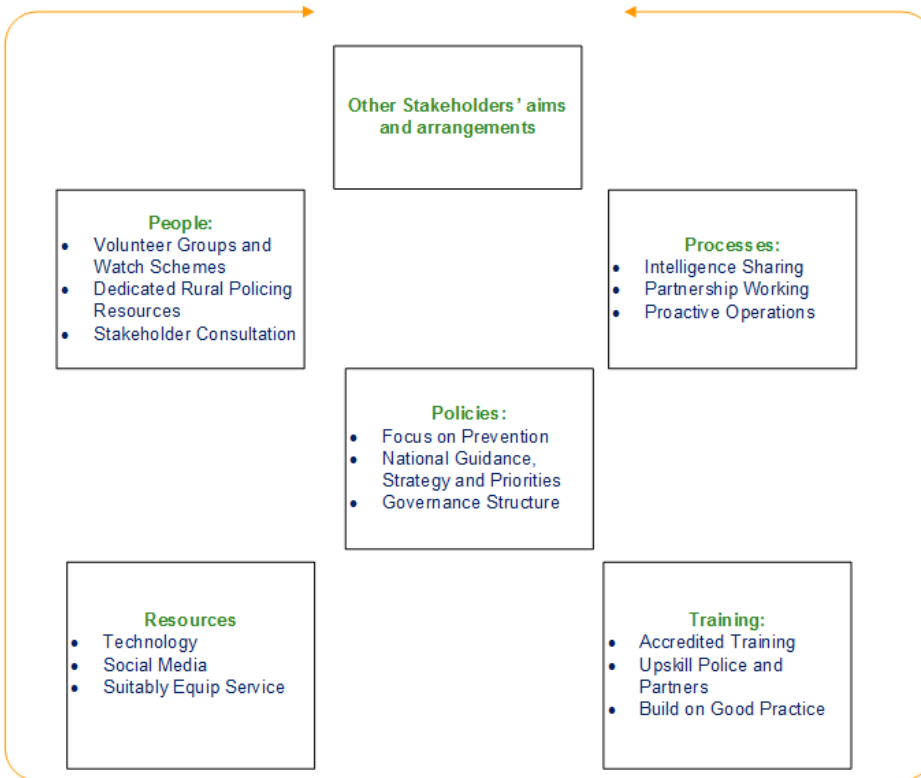
- 5.2.1 \*The police service is contributing to this national issue as a member of the DEFRA lead National Fly-Tipping Prevention Group.
- 5.2.2 \*\*Poaching offences were identified as a priority. The Poaching Priority Delivery Group has previously fallen under the governance of the wildlife crime portfolio. However, due to the cross-over between the animal welfare issues and the antisocial behaviour, threats, gambling, and damage that comes with crimes like hare coursing, fish and deer poaching; this Group will now sit as a priority within both wildlife crime and the rural affairs strategies.
- 5.2.3 Hare coursing has been highlighted as a key area for police to focus on when tackling rural crime by both this strategy but also in the NFU Combatting Rural Crime report of 2017. The UK's flat rural landscapes are the environment for this organised criminal activity. Criminals are prepared to travel hundreds of miles across counties and countries to participate in this blood sport. Organised criminal groups coordinate illegal gambling events, threatening and intimidating rural and farming communities in order to achieve their aims. Residents fall victim to violent incidents and live in fear of these groups returning in the night. Including poaching as a priority across both the Wildlife Crime Strategy and the Rural Affairs Strategy will ensure all elements of this organised crime will have focus.
- 5.3 Initial operational work will be delivered through a small number of Rural Affairs Priority Delivery Groups (see Diagram 1) which will adopt an PREVENTION, INTELLIGENCE, ENFORCEMENT and REASSURANCE approach and:
- Raise the profile of rural crime
  - Set objectives to combat rural crime
  - Utilise effective problem solving
  - Develop strong links with all Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCU) through a regional structure to tackle Organised Crime Groups (OCG) causing significant harm to rural communities
  - Identify and provide evidence for changes to legislation and work with partners to provide meaningful change
  - Increase awareness via partners, the public, and law enforcement agencies
  - Increase intelligence sharing between stakeholders
  - Coordinate a cross border response to Rural Affairs

- 5.4 Organisational Rural Affairs Priorities
- 5.4.1 Findings from the national surveys and key stakeholder engagement have demonstrated the need for a clear organised approach nationally with transparent governance arrangements to develop, consult, approve and manage initiatives and overall service delivery. A service specification was drawn up (see diagram following) which sets out the key areas to develop:
- Creation of a rural affairs strategy, delivery and communication plan
  - Governance structure and creation of an Assurance Group made up of key partners
  - National Intelligence Model products to support prosecution of offenders
  - Enhancing the policing service to rural communities
  - Accredited rural training
- 5.4.2 First steps are to:
- Establish senior NPCC leads for rural affairs and wildlife crime
  - Draft and consult upon a national infrastructure encompassing national, regional, and local decision making
  - Develop a national rural crime strategic threat assessment
- 5.4.3 The strategy will be developed and taken forward using an academically robust evidence base of what works and what is appropriate to the issue being addressed. Delivery work will be prioritised, resourced and managed in line with agreed governance arrangements.

## 6. Summary

- 6.1 The Rural Affairs Strategy will develop incrementally, reflecting the wide and diverse issues faced by rural communities. It will be driven by reliable data to build upon the national evidence base and inform future decisions relating to service standards, training and accreditation, configuration and delivery. Consultation and communications will be tailored to the appropriate audiences and issues so as to be fully inclusive and reap the most beneficial responses for the improvement of services.
- 6.2 Progress will be reported through the infrastructure arrangements and through the bi-annual NPCC Wildlife Crime & Rural Affairs e-newsletter.

# Rural Affairs



# Wildlife Crime & Rural Affairs Delivery Groups



FARM MACHINERY, PLANT & VEHICLE THEFT



LIVESTOCK OFFENCES



FUEL THEFT



EQUINE CRIME



FLY TIPPING



POACHING



BADGER PERSECUTION



BAT PERSECUTION



"CITES"



FRESHWATER PEARL MUSSELS



RAPTOR PERSECUTION



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