

Countryside Alliance Rural Crime Survey 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Countryside Alliance's Rural Crime Survey is the UK's largest annual survey into crime in rural areas. The 2024 Survey has once again revealed the true level of crime in the countryside and its impact on rural communities. The Survey aims to help shape the future of crime prevention and rural policing.
- The Survey had over 1,700 responses from those living and working in the countryside, who gave their views on countryside crimes and their experiences of crime and policing. The Survey covered various topics, including the perceived significance of crime, reported incidents, reporting behaviours, police response, and the overall effectiveness of rural policing.

The Survey has revealed that:

- The majority (96%) of respondents see crime as a significant problem in their area, and 45% believe police are not taking rural crime seriously.
- 73% of respondents were of the view that crime has increased in the last 12 months, reflecting a widespread sentiment that community safety is deteriorating. This perceived escalation contributes to a heightened sense of fear and concern among residents.
- Priority crimes for the police to tackle were identified by respondents as agricultural machinery theft, fly-tipping, livestock theft, and illegal poaching. They were also the top recorded crimes by respondents (agricultural machinery theft – 32%, fly-tipping – 44%, wildlife crime and illegal poaching – 31%).
- Respondents believe that rural crimes are becoming increasingly common, with 69% of respondents saying that agricultural machinery theft is increasing and 76% saying that fly-tipping is increasing.
- 32% of these incidents were not reported to the police. This suggests gaps in the reporting system and a reluctance on the part of those living and working in rural communities to engage with the police. Furthermore, this demonstrates the key issue that the true extent of rural crime is underreported.
- A significant proportion (48%) of rural crime victims who did report incidents to the police were dissatisfied with the response.
- 45% of respondents believe that police do not take rural crime seriously.
- Only 33% of respondents rated the police as 'good' or 'excellent', which suggests an overall dissatisfaction with the police.
- 18% of respondents have considered moving or leaving an area due to crime.

KEY FINDINGS

The **overwhelming majority (96%) of respondents see crime as a significant problem in their area**, and 45% believe police are not taking rural crime seriously.

The **perception that crime has increased in the last 12 months (73%) reflects a widespread sentiment that community safety is deteriorating**.

This perceived escalation contributes to heightened fear and concern among residents. To add in to this, 39% of those surveyed had experienced crime within the past year.

The threat or fear of crime can be as detrimental to people's feeling of safety as crimes themselves. We want to build a clear picture of the issue to shape future policing delivery and ensure funding is spent where it is most needed, rather than simply being channelled to urban conurbations.

Priority crimes

Respondents identified four priority crimes on which police should focus. By effectively addressing these crimes and clearly communicating their efforts to the community, people's sense of security would improve, and trust in the police would grow. The priority crimes include:

1. Agricultural machinery theft
2. Fly-tipping
3. Livestock rustling
4. Poaching – deer and hare

These priorities are reflected by the actual experience of crimes reported by respondents to our survey, with the top reported crimes being:

- 44% reported fly-tipping
- 32% reported agricultural machinery theft
- 32% reported trespass
- 31% reported wildlife crime/hare poaching
- 24% reported animal rights activism
- 23% reported theft from outbuildings

Alarmingly, many of these crimes are on the rise. The growing concern over specific rural crimes should drive policing strategies. Increased collaboration between police and communities is essential to combat these rising issues effectively.

- 76% said fly-tipping is increasing
- 69% said agricultural machinery theft is increasing
- 62% said trespassing is increasing
- 49% said fuel theft is increasing

While steps are already being taken to combat these crimes, more focused action is needed to clamp down on rural criminality and protect these communities.

Lack of reporting and police engagement

A major issue in rural crime is underreporting, with many in rural communities believing that the police can't or won't help. In fact, **32% of incidents reported by survey participants were never brought to the police's attention.** This suggests significant gaps in the reporting system and highlights the reluctance of those living and working in rural communities to engage with the police. These findings are crucial in shedding light on the true extent of crime in rural areas.

The reasons for not reporting crimes vary and are telling, with many citing a perceived lack of police action. This highlights the urgent need for the police to respond effectively to crime and for increased efforts in outreach and education about the importance of reporting incidents and the impact police intervention can have.

Reasons for non-reporting:

- 51% said it would be a waste of time or pointless
- 40% thought police could not have done anything
- 16% dealt with the matter themselves
- 14% felt it was too trivial, or not worth reporting
- 13% had a previous bad experience with the police/criminal justice system

Perceptions of the police

Nearly half (**48%**) of rural crime victims who did report incidents to the police were **dissatisfied with the response.** This signals a significant gap in police engagement with the community. This dissatisfaction suggests the need for improvement in response times and effectiveness to rebuild trust and improve community-police relations.

- 48% of people who reported a crime were dissatisfied with the police response
- 29% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- 17% were satisfied
- 6% were very satisfied

This is mirrored by more general sentiments of a lack of trust and satisfaction with police by rural communities. **45% of respondents believe that police do not take rural crime seriously** and 59% believe that rural policing has not improved since Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) were introduced. This signals a notable lack of trust in the police. Rebuilding trust and actively addressing rural crime concerns should be a priority for both PCCs and the police.

The lack of confidence is also evident in the relatively low ratings of police performance. **Only 33% of respondents rate the police as 'good' or 'excellent', and a mere 15% believe they can rely on the police when needed.** Enhancing public trust and perception must be central to any strategy aimed at tackling rural crime.

- 33% rate the police as 'good' or 'excellent'
- 15% believe the police can be relied upon in an emergency

As trust in police erodes, rural communities are increasingly taking matters into their own hands to combat criminality. This is reflected in the fact that **50% of respondents have installed crime prevention measures at their properties in the past year:**

- 71% put in security lighting
- 69% locked vehicles and secured keys
- 65% installed CCTV, video or infra-red

This feeling of insecurity is doubtless exacerbated by the perception that the number of police officers or stations has declined since they have lived there. Communicating changes effectively and maintaining a visible police presence could mitigate these concerns.

- 71% of people say the number of police officers or stations in their local area has changed since they lived there
- 50% were not aware of any rural crime team operated by the police force in their area

There is also a lack of connection with local officers, which is problematic. Only 21% of respondents knowing their officers' names or how to contact them (outside of emergency numbers), and 93% haven't seen an officer in the past week. This highlights a critical gap in community engagement, emphasising the need for stronger, more consistent community policing efforts.

18% of respondents have considered moving or leaving an area due to crime, demonstrating a sense of insecurity, which is taking its toll on rural communities, with 48% feel intimidated by criminal activity in the past year. These concerns go beyond safety; they have socio-economic implications for rural areas. Addressing them should be a priority for both PCCs and the police.

- 18% of people have considered moving or leaving their local area because of crime
- 48% of people have felt intimidated by criminals or criminality over the last year

It is crucial that the National Rural Crime Unit receives the support it needs to send a strong message that the safety, livelihoods, and concerns of rural communities are a priority.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Countryside Alliance has outlined a number of ways in which the most significant reported rural crimes might be more effectively dealt with, and how trust in the police and satisfaction with rural policing might be improved.

The Countryside Alliance calls for:

- **The government to implement the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023.** This law aims to prevent the theft and resale of equipment and tools used by businesses and tradespeople in England and Wales. Despite being passed in 2023 the government now needs to get on with introducing the regulations that will make the Act operational, setting out specifications for the engine immobilisers and security markings the equipment will be required to use.
- **The government, local authorities and magistrates must take decisive action to combat fly-tipping by fully utilising the powers at their disposal.** This includes ensuring robust enforcement of prosecutions and significantly enhancing access to Civic Amenity Sites to make legal waste disposal more convenient. Public education campaigns to raise awareness about the legal disposal of waste and the consequences of illegal dumping are essential to combat this blight on our countryside. Additionally, greater support must be provided to landowners, who are

often the unintended victims of this crime, by offering assistance in cleaning up and addressing the financial burden of fly-tipping. Only through a coordinated and comprehensive approach can we effectively deter fly-tipping and protect our communities and environments from this growing issue.

- **The government and police to ensure there is better reporting regarding incidents of livestock theft** so that cases can be investigated and recorded to ensure that trends can be tracked more effectively and acted upon. Livestock theft is a serious crime and must be treated as such.
- **Police and magistrates to make full use of new powers to punish hare poaching.** The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 introduced new offences specific to hare poaching, increased penalties and enhanced powers for the courts and police. The Alliance wants to see the full range of powers and penalties deployed and welcomes the Sentencing Council's decision to introduce specific guidance for the courts. This will assist by ensuring that there is a consistency of sentencing across different areas reflecting the seriousness of this offence and that the courts make full use of the additional powers now available to them, such as disqualification orders.
- **The government to support the National Rural Crime Unit with a multi-year long term funding settlement.** Rural crime has significant economic, social, and environmental impacts that threaten rural communities' sustainability and prosperity. The government will send a clear message to rural communities that their safety, livelihoods, and concerns are not a priority if they do not support the National Rural Crime Unit on a long term basis. Rural residents already feel under-policed and overlooked, and a lack of support would reinforce the perception that crime in the countryside is not taken as seriously as in urban areas.

CONCLUSION

The Countryside Alliance's 2024 Rural Crime Survey reveals the widespread feeling among rural communities that crime is a significant problem in their area, with a significant proportion of respondents being victims of crime themselves and a large majority believing rural crime has increased over the past 12 months.

Despite this, nearly a third of crimes suffered have not been reported, as part of a more widespread problem of lack of trust and dissatisfaction with rural policing. Communities feel increasingly unheard and misunderstood.

The Countryside Alliance has outlined a number of ways in which the most significant crimes might be more effectively dealt with, and how trust in the police and satisfaction with rural policing might be improved. We hope that by taking positive actions, and by raising awareness of the issue of rural crime, we can foster an environment where rural communities are safer, and feel safer.

STATISTICAL SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGS

96% of those surveyed think crime is significant in their community

- 37% very significant
- 40% quite significant
- 19% somewhat significant

72% think crime has increased in the last 12 months

PRIORITY CRIMES

The crimes which police should be tackling in rural communities in order of priority are:

1. Agricultural machinery theft
2. Fly-tipping
3. Livestock rustling
4. Poaching – deer and hare

39% of people have had a crime committed against them in the last 12 months and the top 6 rural crimes reported were:

- 44% fly-tipping
- 32% agricultural machinery theft
- 32% trespass
- 31% wildlife crime/hare poaching
- 24% animal rights activism
- 23% theft from outbuildings

Crimes respondents reported as increasing in their area:

- 76% said fly-tipping
- 69% said agricultural machinery theft
- 62% said trespassing
- 49% said fuel theft

LACK OF REPORTING AND POLICE ENGAGEMENT

32% of those crimes were not reported to the police due to:

- 51% said it was a waste of time/would be no point
- 40% thought police could not have done anything
- 16% dealt with the matter themselves
- 14% felt it was too trivial/not worth reporting
- 13% had a previous bad experience with the police/criminal justice system

When people reported crimes to the police, police responded by:

- 38% visited in person
- 32% contacted by phone call
- 20% contacted electronically
- 26% responded in none of these ways

PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICE

48% of rural crime victims who did report incidents to the police were dissatisfied with the response

45% of people believe that police do not take rural crime seriously

62% disagree with the statement that the police are spending more time on tackling rural crime

85% believe that the police cannot be relied on to be there when you need them

59% of people don't think rural policing has improved since Police and Crime Commissioners were introduced in 2012

33% of people rate the police as 'good' or 'excellent' in their area

50% of people had installed crime prevention measures in the last 12 months due to an increased fear of crime (67%) and being a victim of crime (34%)

- 71% put in security lighting
- 69% locked vehicles and secured keys
- 65% installed CCTV, video or infra-red

50% were not aware of any rural crime teams in their area

21% of people know the names of their local officers and how to get in touch with them (aside from ringing 101/999)

48% have felt intimidated by criminality or criminals over the last year (This includes direct threats from criminals or general criminality)

18% of people have considered moving or leaving their local area because of crime

12% felt unsafe after dark in their homes or communities:

- 44% felt less safe than they did 5 years ago
- 3% felt more safe than they did 5 years ago