

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE BRIEFING NOTE: RURAL CRIME

Westminster Hall, Ben Maguire MP

Thursday 27 February 2025

- **As long-term campaigners on the issue of combating rural crime and a founding member of the National Rural Crime Network, the Countryside Alliance conducts an annual Rural Crime Survey. The results of our 2024 survey will be launched at the National Rural Crime Network conference on 25 March.**
- **Our previous 2023 survey, whose results were published in January 2024, covered a range of topics of relevance to this debate including the crimes of greatest concern, reporting behaviours, police response and the overall effectiveness of rural policing.**
- **A significant proportion of respondents (57%) expressed dissatisfaction with the police response to reported crime, which highlights a potential area for improvement in police engagement with the community.**
- **The survey indicated a perception that police do not take rural crime seriously (50%) and the belief that rural policing has not improved (58%) since Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) were introduced, which signals a notable lack of trust in the police.**
- **2024 saw elections to the offices of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in May. Ahead of the election we published our Police and Crime Commissioner Manifesto, which set out six key requests of candidates and elected PCCs (see below).**

Background

- As long-term campaigners on the issue of combating rural crime and a founding member of the National Rural Crime Network, the Countryside Alliance conducts an annual survey of rural communities' experiences and perceptions over the past calendar year.
- We launched our 2024 Rural Crime Survey¹ in October and have been grateful for many MPs' support in promoting it to constituents. It ran over the Christmas period, closing in January 2025. We expect to launch the results at the National Rural Crime Network's 2025 conference on 25 March.
- Our previous survey, whose results were published in January 2023, covered a range of topics of relevance to this debate including reporting behaviours, police response and the overall effectiveness of rural policing.² Preliminary analysis of the 2024 survey suggests the trends it identified are continuing. Further details are given below.

¹ Countryside Alliance, [Countryside Alliance launches 2024 National Rural Crime Survey](#), 23.10.24

² Countryside Alliance, [Nearly six out of 10 do not think rural policing has improved since introduction of Police and Crime commissioners](#), 23.01.24

- 2024 also saw elections to the offices of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in May. Ahead of the election we published our Police and Crime Commissioner Manifesto 2024 which set out our six key requests of candidates and elected PCCs, as also indicated below.³
- Since the election we have held a series of productive meetings with newly-elected and re-elected Police and Crime Commissioners to help inform their statutory Police and Crime Plans. We have also engaged in stakeholder forums on invitation.

Rural Crime Survey 2023

- The overwhelming consensus from respondents (96%) was that crime is a significant issue in rural areas. This underlines a shared perception among residents of vulnerability, and a need for attention to be paid to local safety issues.
 - 96% of respondents believe that crime is significant in their community.
 - 33% - Very significant
 - 41% - Quite significant
 - 22% - Somewhat significant
 - 73% of participants thought that crime had increased in the previous 12 months.
- 35% of those surveyed had experienced crime within the past year. Coupled with the fact that 29% 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.
- The top crimes respondents indicated they had experienced were as follows:
 - Fly-tipping - 37%
 - Agricultural machinery theft - 32%
 - Trespass - 31%
 - Wildlife crime/hare poaching - 27%
 - Animal rights activism - 25%
 - Theft from outbuildings - 25%
- The reasons for not reporting crimes vary, with a significant portion citing a perceived lack of police response. This highlights the importance of police responding effectively to crime, as well as a potential need for outreach and education on the importance of reporting crimes and the possible effects of police intervention.
- Reasons for non-reporting:
 - 50% considered it a waste of time or saw no point.
 - 42% believed the police could not have done anything.
 - 18% felt the matter was too trivial or not worth reporting.
 - 17% had a previous bad experience with the police/criminal justice system.
 - 17% dealt with the matter themselves.

³ Countryside Alliance, [Countryside Alliance launches Police and Crime Commissioner manifesto](#), 10.04.24

- A significant proportion (57%) expressed dissatisfaction with the police response to reported crime, which highlights a potential area for improvement in police engagement with the community. Addressing concerns related to response times and effectiveness could enhance community-police relations.
 - 57% of people who reported a crime were dissatisfied with the police response.
 - 25% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.
 - 13% were satisfied.
 - 5% were very satisfied.
- The survey indicated a perception that police do not take rural crime seriously (50%) and the belief that rural policing has not improved (58%) since Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) were introduced, which signals a notable lack of trust in the police.
- A relatively low percentage (35%) of respondents rated the police as 'good' or 'excellent', which suggests an overall dissatisfaction with the police. Just 15% believed the police can be relied upon when needed. Improving public perception and trust should be central to any strategic initiatives to tackle rural crime.

Police and Crime Commissioner Manifesto 2024

- Launched in April 2024, our Police and Crime Commissioner Manifesto called for action on the following six points:

1. Overhaul the way police prioritise rural crime.

There is clear evidence that much rural crime meets the criteria for being serious and organised. However, current guidelines on police priorities and responses do not give rural crime the necessary prominence. We are calling for the College of Policing to review and update its Threat, Harm and Investigation guidelines (THRIVE) to reflect the growing serious and organised element of rural criminality and its impact on rural communities.

2. Support dedicated rural crime teams.

A single point of contact in the community through rural crime teams adds confidence that reported crimes will be investigated, with the full impact on the rural community understood. Many forces have already set up a dedicated team but PCCs must ensure the funding for them continues. If there is no dedicated team, PCCs should provide their full support and funding for one to be set up.

3. Ensure the police take rural crime seriously.

50% of people don't think the police take rural crime seriously and 58% of people think rural policing has not improved since Police and Crime Commissioners were introduced in 2012. The figures demonstrate a feeling within rural communities that the police cannot do anything about many crimes. PCCs can ensure that police not only understand rural communities but also take action to reassure those who live and work in the countryside.

4. Rebuild trust between rural communities and the police.

PCCs have a key role in rebuilding trust and focusing police on rural crime via their Police and Crime Plan, but if they are serious about developing effective strategies to combat rural crime that requires collaboration between communities and the police. This includes working with groups such as Farm Watch and Neighbourhood Watch, using these invaluable community resources to complement policing and crime prevention initiatives.

5. Encourage rural communities to report rural crime.

Non-reporting is a serious problem. Those surveyed by the Countryside Alliance felt either it was a waste of their time to report crime or the police would not be able to do anything. It should be made easier for people to report crimes, and when they are reported, they must be taken seriously. Working with their force and local communities, PCCs can ensure the message of “reporting every crime” is understood by all communities and acted upon.

6. Target police resources better.

Resources are routinely focused on areas that have the greatest ‘threat, risk and harm’. Rural communities come in all shapes and sizes and their needs vary greatly from one area to the next. Particular challenges also exist in tackling crimes that are unique to rural areas. Crime, crime prevention, community safety and support services in the countryside must be understood and viewed from a rural context. PCCs should get to know their communities, understand their needs, and match services and resources to them.

Equipment Theft Act 2023

- The Countryside Alliance strongly supported and helped shape the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023⁴, brought in as a Private Member’s Bill by Greg Smith MP. The Act targets the theft and re-sale of equipment used by tradespeople and agricultural and other businesses, requiring that they be fitted with engine immobilisers, securely marked and recorded when sold. We believe the Act stands to make an important contribution to tackling rural crime.
- To be brought into force, however, the Act requires the government to bring secondary legislation to define the requirements it establishes. This has yet to be done and we urge it to move forward without further delay. The government’s current position is that the regulations will be in place by the summer.⁵

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⁴ Legislation.gov.uk, [Equipment Theft \(Prevention\) Act 2023](#)

⁵ HC Deb, 13.01.15, [c10](#)