Rural Crime Survey 2023: Understanding community perceptions and experiences

KEY FINDING: Ahead of the Police and Crime Commissioner elections in 2024, the Countryside Alliance's annual Rural Crime Survey shows that confidence in policing is low and 58% of people don't think rural policing has improved since Police and Crime Commissioners were introduced in 2012. If we are to tackle rural crime, we must rebuild trust between rural communities and the police.

Introduction

The largest-ever annual survey into crime in rural areas has once again investigated the true level of crime in the countryside. The Countryside Alliance Rural Crime Survey had over 2,000 responses from those living and working in the countryside who gave their views on countryside crimes and the impact they have on the wider community, aiming to help shape the future of crime prevention and rural policing.

The survey covered a range of topics, including the perceived significance of crime, reported incidents, reporting behaviours, police response, and the overall effectiveness of rural policing. We believe the true extent of rural crime is underreported, which is why the results of this survey are so important in showing the real experiences of those living and working in the countryside.

The 2023 rural crime survey showed that the overwhelming majority (96%) of respondents see crime as a significant problem in their area, and half believe police are not taking crime seriously. The perceived significance of overall rural crime dwarfs that of wildlife crime, a subset that receives vastly inflated attention given its low levels of incidence and community impact.

The threat 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. The ultimate aim is to make rural communities safer, and to feel safer.

Analysis

1.   Perception of crime

The overwhelming consensus from respondents (96%) is 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

2. Crime trends

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.

- 73% of participants think crime has increased in the last 12 months.

3. Incidents and reporting

35% of those surveyed had experienced crime within the past year. Coupled with the fact that nearly one-third 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.

- 35% of respondents experienced a crime in the last 12 months.
- Top reported rural crimes:
    - Fly-tipping - 37%
    - Agricultural machinery theft - 32%
    - Trespass - 31%
    - Wildlife crime/hare poaching - 27%
    - Animal rights activism - 25%
    - Theft from outbuildings - 25%
- 29% of these crimes were not reported to the police.

4. Reasons for non-reporting

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.

5. Prioritised crimes for police

Respondents to the survey identified the following priority crimes that the police should tackle to align with rural concerns, emphasising the impact on agriculture and community wellbeing. Addressing these issues would contribute to an enhanced sense of security and satisfaction within rural communities.

- Agricultural machinery theft
- Fly-tipping
- Livestock rustling
- Fuel theft

6. Crime prevention measures

The adoption of crime prevention measures indicates a proactive response from rural residents. However, this also suggests a community that feels compelled to take matters into their own hands, owing to perceived gaps in the effectiveness of rural policing.

- 50% installed crime prevention measures in the last 12 months.
    - 72% - Security lighting.
    - 68% - Locked vehicles and secured keys.
    - 64% - Installed CCTV, video, or infra-red.
    - 17% - Guard dog

7. Police response satisfaction

The significant proportion (57%) expressing dissatisfaction with police responses 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.

8. Perception of police and rural crime

The 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 signal 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.

- 50% of people don't think the police take rural crime seriously.
- 58% don't think rural policing has improved since PCCs were introduced in 2012.

9. Overall trust and satisfaction with police

The relatively low percentage (35%) of respondents rating the police as 'good' or 'excellent' suggests an overall dissatisfaction with the police; just 15% believe the police can be relied upon when needed. Improving public perception and trust should be central to any strategic initiatives to tackle rural crime.

- 35% of people rate the police as 'good' or 'excellent' in their area.
- 15% believe that the police can be relied on to be there when needed.

10. Impact on community

Considerations of moving or leaving an area due to crime (16%) show the impact crime has on community cohesion and stability. Efforts to address these concerns should consider broader socio-economic implications.

- 16% of people have considered moving or leaving their local area because of crime.
- 44% have felt intimidated by criminality or criminals over the last year.

11. Community engagement with police

Limited knowledge of local officers (21%) and infrequent police visibility (90% not seeing officers in the last seven days) point to potential gaps in community-police engagement. Strengthening community policing efforts and fostering positive relationships are essential.

- 21% of people know the names of their local officers and how to get in touch with them (aside from ringing 101/999).
- 90% have not seen any officers in their local area in the last seven days.

12. Changes in policing presence

The perception that the number of police officers or stations has changed (74%) may contribute to feelings of insecurity. Communicating changes effectively and maintaining a visible police presence could mitigate these concerns.

- 74% say the number of police officers or stations in their local area has changed since they lived there.
- 52% were not aware of any rural crime team operated by the police force in their area.

13. Police response methods

Variation in response methods indicates a need for flexibility in police communication. Enhancing electronic communication channels could improve accessibility and responsiveness to community needs.

- When people reported crimes to the police, police responded by:
    - 30% visited in person.
    - 24% contacted by phone call.
    - 17% contacted electronically.
    - 29% responded in none of these ways.

14. Increasing problems with certain crimes

The perceived increase in specific rural crimes demands targeted policing strategies. Collaborative efforts between police and the community are essential to address these rising concerns effectively.

- 74% said agricultural machinery theft was increasing.
- 73% said fly-tipping was increasing.
- 63% said trespassing was increasing.
- 56% said fuel theft was increasing.

Conclusion

The Countryside Alliance Rural Crime Survey results reveal a complex landscape of perceptions, concerns and experiences related to rural crime. It highlights significant concerns within the community regarding crime, reporting mechanisms, and police response. Addressing these issues is crucial to improving community safety and restoring trust in the police. This will require a multifaceted approach, including improved communication, community engagement, targeted policing strategies, and efforts to rebuild trust between residents and the police.

Countryside Alliance calls for:

- **Trust to be rebuilt between rural communities and the police.**
  This requires further analysis and collaboration between communities and the police to develop effective strategies to combat rural crime. PCCs have a key role to play in rebuilding this trust and focusing police on rural crime via their Police and Crime Plan.

- **The police to take rural crime seriously.**
  The figures in the survey demonstrate a feeling within rural communities that the police cannot do anything about many crimes. Police and Crime Commissioners can ensure that police not only understand rural communities, but also take action to reassure those who live and work in the countryside.

- **Rural communities to report rural crime.**
  Non-reporting is a serious problem. Those surveyed by the Countryside Alliance felt it was either a waste of their time to report crime or that 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.

- **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, they should provide their full support and funding for one to be set up.

2023 Rural Crime Survey	2022 Rural Crime Survey	2021 Rural Crime Survey
🔻 **96% of those surveyed think crime is significant in their community** • 33% very significant • 41% quite significant • 22% somewhat significant	🔺 **97% of those surveyed think crime is significant in their community** • 42% very significant • 39% quite significant • 16% somewhat significant	**95% of those surveyed think crime is significant in their community** • 34% very significant • 39% quite significant • 22% somewhat significant
🔻 **73% think crime has increased in the last 12 months**	🔺 **77% think crime has increased in the last 12 months**	**70% think crime has increased in the last 12 months**
🔻 **35% of people have had a crime committed against them in the last 12 months and the top 6 rural crimes reported were** 🔻 Fly-tipping - 37% 🔻 Agricultural machinery theft - 32% = Trespass - 31%	= **43% of people have had a crime committed against them in the last 12 months and the top 6 rural crimes reported were** 🔻 Fly-tipping - 38% 🔺 Agricultural machinery theft - 35% 🔻 Trespass - 31% 🔻 Theft from outbuildings - 30%	**43% of people have had a crime committed against them in the last 12 months and the top 6 rural crimes reported were** Fly-tipping - 43% Trespass - 36% Agricultural machinery theft - 32% Wildlife crime/ hare poaching - 30%

⬇ Wildlife crime/ hare poaching - 27% = Animal rights activism - 25% ⬇ Theft from outbuildings - 25%	⬇ Wildlife crime/ hare poaching - 27% ⬆ Animal rights activism - 25%	Theft from outbuildings - 27% Criminal damage – arson/vandalism - 24%
⬆ **29% of those crimes were not reported to the police due to:** • 50% said it was a waste of time/would be no point • 42% thought police could not have done anything • 18% felt it was too trivial/not worth reporting • 17% had a previous bad experience with the police/criminal justice system • 17% dealt with the matter themselves	⬇ **25% of those crimes were not reported to the police due to:** • 63% said it was a waste of time/would be no point • 38% thought police could not have done anything • 21% felt it was too trivial/not worth reporting • 20 % had a previous bad experience with the police/criminal justice system • 14 % dealt with the matter themselves	**28% of those crimes were not reported to the police due to:** • 52% said it was a waste of time/would be no point • 42% thought police could not have done anything • 16% felt it was too trivial/not worth reporting • 16% dealt with the matter themselves • 15% had previous bad experience with police/criminal justice system
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. Fuel theft	**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	**The crimes which police should be tackling in rural communities in order of priority are:** 1. Fly-tipping 2. Livestock rustling 3. Poaching – deer and hare 4. Agricultural machinery theft
⬇ **50% of people had installed crime prevention measures in the last 12 months due to an increased fear of crime (63%) and being a victim of crime (29%)** • 72% put in security lighting • 68% locked vehicles and secured keys • 64% installed CCTV, video or infra-red	⬆ **54% of people had installed crime prevention measures in the last 12 months due to an increased fear of crime (66%) and being a victim of crime (35%)** • 74% put in security lighting • 68% locked vehicles and secured keys • 67% installed CCTV, video or infra-red	**53% of people had installed crime prevention measures in the last 12 months due to an increased fear of crime (62%) and being a victim of crime (37%)** • 74% put in security lighting • 68% locked vehicles and secured keys • 65% installed CCTV, video or infra-red
⬆ **57% of people who reported a crime were**	⬆ **55% of people who reported a crime were**	**48% 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	dissatisfied with the police response	dissatisfied with the police response
⬆ **50% of people don't think the police take rural crime seriously**	⬆**49% of people don't think the police take rural crime seriously**	**46% of people don't think the police take rural crime seriously**
⬇ **58% of people don't think rural policing has improved since Police and Crime Commissioners were introduced in 2012**	⬆**59% of people don't think rural policing has improved since Police and Crime Commissioners were introduced in 2012**	**56% of people don't think rural policing has improved since Police and Crime Commissioners were introduced in 2012**
⬆**35% of people rate the police as 'good' or 'excellent' in their area**	⬇**34% of people rate the police as 'good' or 'excellent' in their area**	**40% of people rate the police as 'good' or 'excellent' in their area**
⬇**15% believe that the police can be relied on to be there when you need them.**	⬇**16% believe that the police can be relied on to be there when you need them.**	**19% believe that the police can be relied on to be there when you need them.**
= 61% disagree with the statement that the police are spending more time on tackling rural crime	⬆**61% disagree with the statement that the police are spending more time on tackling rural crime**	**59% disagree with the statement that the police are spending more time on tackling rural crime**
= 16% of people have considered moving or leaving their local area because of crime	**= 16% of people have considered moving or leaving their local area because of crime.**	**16% of people have considered moving or leaving their local area because of crime.**
⬇**44% have felt intimidated by criminality or criminals over the last year.** (This includes direct threats from criminals or general criminality).	⬆ **50% have felt intimidated by criminality or criminals over the last year.** (This includes direct threats from criminals or general criminality).	**48% have felt intimidated by criminality or criminals over the last year.** (This includes direct threats from criminals or general criminality).
⬇**21% of people know the names of their local officers and how to get in touch with them** (aside from ringing 101/999)	**25% of people know the names of their local officers and how to get in touch with them** (aside from ringing 101/999)?	**25% of people know the names of their local officers and how to get in touch with them** (aside from ringing 101/999)?
90% have not seen any officers in their local area in the last seven days.	⬆ **90% have not seen any officers in their local area in the last seven days.**	**89% have not seen any officers in their local area in the last seven days.**
⬆ **74% say the number of police officers or stations in their local area has changed since they lived there.**	⬇**70% say the number of police officers or stations in their local area has changed since they lived there.**	**71% say the number of police officers or stations in their local area has changed since they lived there.**

When people reported crimes to the police, police responded by: • 30% visited in person • 24% contacted by phone call • 17% contacted electronically • 29% responded in none of these ways		
Problems with certain rural crimes are increasing: • 74% said agricultural machinery theft was increasing • 73% said fly-tipping was increasing • 63% said trespassing was increasing • 56% said fuel theft was increasing		
12% felt unsafe after dark in their homes or communities • 42% felt less safe than they did 5 years ago • 2% felt more safe than they did 5 years ago		
52% were not aware of any rural crime team in their area		