



# WEST MERCIA POLICE AND CRIME PANEL 21 SEPTEMBER 2020

## THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONERS (PCC) RURAL CRIME DELIVERY PLAN UPDATE

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### Recommendation

1. Members of the Panel are asked to note this report.

### Background

2. The PCC's Rural Crime Strategy was published in March 2020 following public consultation and consultation with the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel. The Strategy sets out the PCC's aspirations for tackling rural crime based on the PIER approach of:

- Prevention ;
- Intelligence;
- Enforcement; and
- Reassurance.

3. Each PIER section within the Strategy sets out a number of commitments to facilitate delivery of the overarching aspirations and objective of the Strategy which is to reduce crimes that most impact on rural communities.

4. The commitments and associated activities have been captured in a Strategy Delivery Plan to provide an overview of activity in relation to rural crime, to enable monitoring of progress against the commitments set out in the Strategy.

5. The Delivery Plan has been updated to the end of August and an extract from it is attached at Appendix 1. Oversight of the delivery plan is provided by the PCC's governance meeting.

6. Some examples of activity in support of the Rural Crime Strategy PIER approach, all of which are included in the delivery plan, are shown below.

### Prevention

#### Rural resources

7. Additional funding provided by the PCC through the Precept has enabled the force to provide warranted officers in each local policing areas whose role is focused on rural and business crime, this is in addition to the five existing rural and business

officers (RABOs). These officers and staff form part of the wider problem solving teams, with one 'hub' located in each local policing area.

8. The PCC's Policy and Commissioning Teams have worked with force leads in the development of a performance framework for the hubs which is used to capture outputs and outcomes of the whole team included the RABOs and PC's working on rural and business crime. Feedback from across the areas indicates that the prevention and reassurance work undertaken by the RABOs has been impacted by Covid-19, however they have all proactively continued using other means of communication and engagement.

9. Examples of the work undertaken in the hubs to tackle rural crime include:

**Telford** – Assisting Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) officers when a wild bird had been seized and taken to a Wildlife Rescue Centre, taking statements and preparing a prosecution file (PC) and visiting 42 farms and food producers in support of the We Don't Buy Crime farm initiative (RABO).

**Shropshire** – Managing 1 wildlife crime incident and 5 poaching incidents and contacting people reporting incidents in rural areas to police that did not generate attendance to provide reassurance and advice (RABO). The PCs in Shropshire have taken part in cross border patrols and run a successful local poaching operation which led to 2 vehicles and 3 dogs being seized along with catapults and multiple ball bearings seized for poaching offences.

**Herefordshire** – the RABO has been maintaining visibility through social media, newsletter and site visits to victims and others across the County. A number of social media articles/signposting have resulted in a total of 11,432 views and 343 likes and the Business Community followers via LinkedIn are up 8 from 490 to 498 and his continues to be a growth area.

**North Worcestershire** – the RABO has created an SNT update newsletter which goes out every two weeks to alert SNT across North Worcestershire of any emerging rural crime trends and issues. The Police Constable (PC) worked with the Shropshire PC's on the cross area poaching issue highlighted by Shropshire above. They also attended a farm following barn fire, offering support and taking a statement, this was followed up two weeks later with a reassurance visit.

**South Worcestershire** – The RABO has been able to maintain contact with rural communities via text, phone, social media and email during COVID-19 and has used the liveried vehicle to actively patrol rural locations to provide visible reassurance.

10. In the last financial year, the PCC provided funds for the provision of 5 dedicated rural and business liveried vehicles which are in use by the teams in the problem solving hubs. More recently the PCC has funded a new 4x4 vehicle. The robust vehicle, which is being allocated to the Bishop's Castle Safer Neighbourhood Team, will allow officers to further tackle criminality in the countryside, including farm thefts and wildlife crime. The new 4x4 will increase officer presence in remote areas and allow them to continue protecting rural communities from being subject to crime.

## **Intelligence**

### **Rural Crime Measures**

11. The PCC's Rural Crime Strategy includes a commitment to work with the force to develop a suite of measures that better reflect the rural and wildlife crime issues affecting West Mercia's communities. Work commenced in March with a workshop attended by a range of internal stakeholders to agree an approach for taking this work forward. After assessing the most effective approach it was decided to focus on the recording of incidents in the new SAAB Contact Management System. Since the initial workshop a number of factors including COVID-19 and the move to the new SAAB environment have led to a significant delay in the project. The PCC will be engaging with the force to seek a resolution of the delay.

### **Community intelligence**

12. Through the Rural Crime Strategy, the PCC is seeking to encourage communities and watch schemes to be more confident and proactive in reporting rural crimes. A recent example where the PCC has been able to champion this, is in South Worcestershire where the South Worcestershire's Rural Watch group has been responsible for providing the force with information that has led to the recovery of nine items of stolen property and five arrests. By highlighting this good news story, the PCC is encouraging people to report crime and to engage or join their local watch schemes. The force also highlights good news stories where information provided by the public has led to a positive result. A recent example was in Herefordshire where a stolen mini digger was recovered by the rural crime team and three people arrested, using intelligence provided by the public.

## **Enforcement**

### **Targeting prolific offenders**

13. The Rural Crime Strategy recognises that serious and organised crime is a driver for a significant amount of rural crime, which is why the delivery plan contains a number of cross references to the PCC's Serious and Organised (SOC) Strategy. One example of organised criminality which impacts on often vulnerable people in rural communities is County Lines. West Mercia Police has a targeted approach to disrupting and dismantling this type of criminal activity and has had a number of notable successes. One recent example is in South Worcestershire where an ongoing County Line investigation by the South Worcester Proactive Team into a drug line running from the West Midlands into Evesham, led to the arrest of 5 men from the West Midlands. In addition, the investigation has so far recovered over £8000 in cash, over ½ kg of Cannabis and a significant amount of crack cocaine, heroin and numerous weapons including machetes and a Taser.

### **Cross border activity**

14. Operation Whitebeam is an example of a cross border operation specifically targeting rural crime. As part of the operation, police officers in South Shropshire patrolled areas around Bridgnorth, Much Wenlock and Highley thereby showing an increase in police presence in rural areas to deter criminals and provide reassurance

to the community. Along with high visibility patrols, vehicles were stopped and motorists spoken to on key roads in the area.

## **Reassurance**

15. Following a period of time where there was no identified communications lead for rural crime, a member of the Force Communications Team has now been identified as lead. They are currently reviewing the existing Rural Crime Comms Strategy with a view to refreshing and relaunching it. The PCC's office has engaged with the Comms lead to ensure the PCC's Rural Crime Strategy influences the approach taken.

16. As part of his rural focus campaign the PCC undertook a series of Rural Focus events, which were delivered between January and March. The events reached out to some of West Mercia's most rural communities and enabled the PCC to listen directly to the concerns of rural communities. The events, which were delivered to coincide with the launch of the PCCs Rural Crime Strategy, have provided a wealth of crime prevention advice, and given people the opportunity to collect a free SmartWater crime prevention pack and talk to specialist rural and business officers and local policing teams. COVID-19 has impacted on the subsequent roll out of any further events, but work is ongoing to promote rural crime related activity wherever possible and it is hoped to deliver the rural focus events using other engagement methods.

## **Supporting Information**

Appendix 1 – Delivery plan extract.

## **Contact Points for the Report**

For the PCC's office: Andy Champness, Police and Crime Commissioner Chief Executive

[andrew.champness@westmercia.pnn.police.uk](mailto:andrew.champness@westmercia.pnn.police.uk)

For Panel support: Sheena Jones, Democratic, Governance and Scrutiny Manager

Tel: 01905 844871

[sjones19@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:sjones19@worcestershire.gov.uk)

## **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.

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