



Report of the Police and Crime Panel

Report title: Work of the Rural Crime Task Force

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Author and contact: ACC Local Policing, Christian Bunt

Purpose of the report: As requested by the Panel

Recommendations: For information only

Executive Summary

The Rural Crime Task Force (RCTF) has achieved significant success throughout the past year, surpassing initial expectations by uncovering links to serious organised crime networks. Collaborative efforts with international partners, including the FBI, have highlighted the extent of criminal activities transcending continents.

While the RCTF operates across the Thames Valley region, patrols have primarily concentrated on rural areas such as Cherwell, West Oxfordshire, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, West Berkshire, Milton Keynes, and Aylesbury.

Annual Statistics for the Year Ending 2023:

- Completed Investigations: 663
- Arrests Made: 74
- Offences Arrested For: 97
- Positive Outcomes: 161 (24.3% rate)
- Stop Searches: 315 conducted, with 106 yielding positive results (33.7% rate), an increase of 214 from 2022.
- Stop Checks: 1568 conducted, up by 150 from 2022.
- S165 Tickets Issued: 176, up by 150 from 2022.

Total Property Recovery Since RCTF's Inception:

- £4,492,368, with £2.08 million recovered in 2023 alone.
- Notable Recoveries Include:
 - Over 50 tractors
 - 33 caravans
 - 187 cars
 - 57 vans
 - 76 drug seizures



Report of the Police and Crime Panel

- 16 plant trailers
- 51 pieces of plant machinery

Additionally, the RCTF coordinated a regional operational week focusing on strategic road networks and ports to combat stolen property trafficking. The Rural Crime Partnership has successfully transitioned to an independently chaired status, receiving regular updates on RCTF operations.

Awareness Initiatives:

The RCTF utilised social media platforms extensively to disseminate crime prevention advice and increase awareness of rural crime, particularly its association with serious organised crime networks. Key metrics include:

- 1903 social media posts
- 715 shares of crime prevention advice
- 3.8 million Facebook impressions
- Facebook connections: 5.1k
- Twitter connections: 1.1k

Highlighted Success Stories:

1. The recovery of a stolen baby donkey garnered national and international attention, highlighting the RCTF's dedication and effectiveness in addressing diverse rural crime incidents.
2. The team's efforts in dealing with livestock worrying, Hare Coursing, and poaching offences have resulted in a higher number of positive outcomes. The significant reduction in Hare Coursing has boosted confidence in Thames Valley Police within the rural community.
3. Operation Yapping led to the charging of six offenders from three different force areas with conspiracy to steal trailers from three different police forces.

Addressing Key Challenges:

1. National Definition of Rural Crime: There is a pressing need for a standardised definition of rural crime across all police forces to facilitate better comparisons and collaboration.
2. Improving Property Documentation: Farmers and estate owners must maintain comprehensive records of their property to aid RCTF investigations. National initiatives are necessary to address this challenge effectively.
3. Registration of High-Value Items: Implementing a system for registering farm machinery, power tools, and caravans upon sale onto a centralised intelligence system would enhance law enforcement's ability to combat theft. Collaboration with insurance companies could facilitate this process.



Matthew Barber

Police & Crime Commissioner
for Thames Valley

Report of the Police and Crime Panel

4. **Enhancing Security Measures:** High-value machinery should be equipped with advanced security features such as trackers, pin code ignitions, immobilisers, and forensic marking to deter theft and disrupt organised crime activities.

Conclusions/Next Steps

The RCTF's achievements underscore its vital role in combating rural crime within the Thames Valley region. To sustain and expand these successes, it is imperative to address key challenges such as standardising definitions, enhancing property documentation practices, implementing registration systems, and improving security measures. Collaborative efforts with stakeholders at local, national, and international levels remain essential to effectively tackle the complex nature of rural crime.