



Date: *TBC*

Michael Lane
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(by email)

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Dear Mr Lane,

Hampshire Police and Crime Panel's Proactive Scrutiny of Rural Crime

At the 7 April 2017 meeting, Members of the Hampshire Police and Crime Panel reviewed the evidence received from yourself and other organisations in relation to rural crime within the Hampshire policing area.

This review aimed to scrutinise and support you in your role as Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in your intention to keep rural communities across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight safe and secure. This review considered progress made against some of the key areas discussed in the Panel's previous report on rural crime (October 2014) and looked to identify and discuss those issues of current interest

The review looked at the following key questions:

- How well have the PCC and his office worked with organisations engaged in the prevention of rural crime to foster partnership working and increase the sharing of information between agencies?
- How effective has the PCC been in engaging with rural communities to allay the fear of crime and increase the confidence of residents in protecting themselves from the risk of rural crime?
- What are the key concerns and priorities which need to be considered by the PCC to support the development of his new Rural Crime Strategy for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight?

Following a review of the evidence received, the Panel have outlined their findings below for your consideration.

Findings

Members of the Panel noted that evidence received demonstrated that many of the concerns which were important to rural communities of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight at the time of the Panel's previous scrutiny in 2014 were still relevant today. In particular the evidence has suggested:

- A need for greater engagement between the Commissioner, and his office, with those living and working in rural communities. Although the evidence has recognised that efforts have been made to engage with residents, particularly through the recent 'Rural Communities Matter' conferences, many of those responding to the review were unable to identify any specific engagement from the Commissioner. In particular, as highlighted in recommendation (a) of the Panel's previous report, town and parish councils are keen for greater dissemination of information from the OPCC and the Constabulary, which could then be shared with residents through parish newsletters and parish and town council social media accounts.
- The fear and perception of crime within rural communities is still significantly higher than the actual prevalence of crime. Whilst this is difficult to address, due to the remoteness of rural communities and the more proportionate impact of certain crime types in comparison to urban areas, evidence to this review has suggested that further reassurance is required from the Constabulary following report of rural crime that appropriate action is being taken and offenders pursued.
- There is still a desire for more visible policing within rural communities, to act as both reassurance for residents and a deterrent to those seeking to commit crime. In oral evidence it was heard that the Constabulary had made efforts to retain police officers and PSCO's within the same rural location, with written evidence positively noting the efforts of a number of individual officers. However in modern times of austerity, more innovative approaches may be needed to provide a 'policing presence' in the absence of the traditional 'bobby on the beat'.

Additionally new concerns were raised in relation to:

- *The effectiveness of the Constabulary's 101 service* - Comments received suggested concerns regarding the speed of response to reports made and a lack feedback from the Constabulary following contact. It was noted that over 1 million calls are received to the service each year, and whilst quantitative statistics are measured, oral evidence suggested further efforts are needed to assess the qualitative outcomes delivered by the service.
- *The impact of recent concerns within rural communities* - Evidence received noted that the increased use of satellite navigation devices is creating traffic issues in smaller villages, as people are diverted onto smaller roads not

suitable for volume traffic and fly tipping was an emerging issue causing upset to residents. It was further noted that theft from vehicles was a major concern within the New Forest area, with visitors and tourists falling victim.

The evidence also provided a number of positive examples of efforts made to improve the approach to rural crime across Hampshire and the IOW, including:

- Hampshire Constabulary is recognised as one of the few policing areas to have a dedicated rural crime team. Inspector Louise Hubble, who provided oral evidence to this review on behalf of Hampshire Constabulary, has recently been awarded an OBE for her work in the Rural Communities of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, including setting up and leading the dedicated rural crime team. The efforts of the Country Watch team were also well recognised, as well as the dedication of rural police officers and PSCO's
- The Hampshire and IOW Rural Crime Partnership, chaired by Hampshire Constabulary, is regarded as a positive forum which brings together a variety of partners to better understand the issues facing rural communities, and to develop a holistic multi-faceted response to address these issues. It is also noted within the evidence that strong links have been developed between the blue light services operating across Hampshire and the IOW leading to greater collaboration and ensuring that information is shared between the services in an efficient and effective manner.
- The OPCC had sought to use innovative approaches to increase attendance at the recent 'Rural Communities Matter' conferences, which didn't rely upon on-line mediums. Examples given included visiting local focal points, targeting appropriate radio channels for those driving agricultural vehicles and using beer mats as a form of promotion. The conferences were held across five different geographical locations, as opposed to one location previously, and resultantly attendance had increased by 50%. The conferences were well received, with an overwhelming majority of responses reflecting on their positive effect in both communicating directly with rural communities and building an enhanced partnership approach to rural crime.
- It was recognised that the Commissioner had made efforts to improve the Firearms/Shotgun application process, which was noted as an area for immediate improvement within the Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan.
- Hampshire Constabulary have made efforts to reassure residents of their dedication to address rural crime, including seeking to secure continuity of PSCO's placed within rural communities and through adapting their approach to crimes in rural areas which have a greater impact than those in urban conurbations, such as non dwelling burglary.
- A new self-evident app and the customer management system, being introduced later this year, are tools launched by Hampshire Constabulary which intend to reduce the pressure upon the 101 telephone service and enable members of the public to report crimes more easily, whilst receiving confirmation of and updates against their report.

Further, in reviewing the evidence received, Members brought forth a number of recommendations, which they wish to raise for your consideration:

- a. That the Commissioner should seek opportunities for greater engagement with rural communities both directly, and through consideration of how information can be disseminated through local town and parish councils. Consideration should be given to encouraging two-way conversation, to enable responses and concerns to be relayed back to the OPCC, and utilising innovative approaches to reach into the heart of rural communities. The Commissioner should also ensure that, as much is practicable, information is accessible to those without, or with limited access to online mediums, to encourage wider awareness and understanding of the Commissioner's efforts to keep rural communities safer.
- b. That the Commissioner should, through his role in holding the Chief Constable to account, seek to enhance the perception of the policing response to crimes reported within rural communities, working with local residents to manage their expectations of outcomes and to ensure appropriate feedback following the report of crime. One of the intentions of this activity should be, through increasing confidence in policing outcomes, to increase the level of reporting of rural crimes.
- c. That the Commissioner should review with the Constabulary the effectiveness of the 101 service in Hampshire and the IOW, ensuring that both qualitative and quantitative measures are in place. The new self-evident app and the customer management system, being introduced by Hampshire Constabulary later this year, should also be evaluated jointly in order to ensure that residents reporting non-emergency rural crime are receiving an effective and appropriate policing response.
- d. That the Commissioner works with the Constabulary to encourage them to develop innovative approaches in delivering a 'visible policing presence' and greater interaction with local communities, within budgetary constraints, which will both provide greater reassurance to residents and deter criminal activity within the rural communities of Hampshire and the IOW.
- e. That the Commissioner should continue to develop and lead partnership working with other organisations that have a shared interest in addressing rural crime. A focus for such partnerships should be delivering a holistic approach to help communities keep themselves safe from rural crime and to provide clear prevention advice.

- f. Following the recent 'Rural Communities Matter' conferences, the Commissioner should ensure that any actions agreed are addressed in a timely manner, to provide reassurance to residents that their concerns are being listened to, and that agreed outcomes are transferred to the new rural crime strategy.
- g. In developing the new rural crime strategy, the Panel would encourage the Commissioner to address the key concerns raised through the Panel's review, ensuring that the strategy outlines measurable outcomes. Once a new definition of rural crime is agreed nationally, the Panel would also suggest that the Commissioner reviews the new rural crime strategy to ensure that it is fit for purpose within the new definition, and makes any revisions as required.

The Panel were pleased to hear, through oral evidence that OPCC consider this review timely, and a positive contribution to efforts to reduce rural crime. The Panel have drawn through this review a number of areas of focus, which through addressing either within the new rural crime strategy or through other means, would enable the Commissioner to demonstrate his commitment to keeping rural communities safer.

We look forward to receiving, in due course, your response to the recommendations outlined above, including consideration as to how the recommendations made will be incorporated into related activities within your Delivery Plan.

Yours Sincerely,



Councillor David Stewart
Chair, Hampshire Police and Crime Panel