

# Rural Policing

In comparison with the cities, rural areas have relatively low crime levels. However the crimes committed can be serious and can have a significant impact on the community.

Rural areas do suffer from crime and disorder issues and there can be a substantial fear of crime.

In 2003 the Constabulary's Rural Issues Group continued its work to bring together representatives from the nine rural Basic Command Units (BCUs) and to push forward the rural policing strategy. The Rural Issues Group, which is chaired by a superintendent, was formed to allocate and monitor use of the Rural Issues Fund, given to the Constabulary by central government.

The aims of the Rural Policing strategy are:

- To ensure visible and effective policing delivery to rural areas by local officers
- To adopt a problem solving approach to issues involving partnerships with local problem solvers and authorities
- To put in place crime reduction initiatives
- To provide accessibility and reassurance to persons living in rural areas

In April 2003 Hampshire Constabulary received £220,000 from the Government's Police Modernisation Fund to be directed towards rural policing. The money was divided between: supporting the continued use of mobile police stations; equine liaison/Horse-Watch; and local initiatives targeting rural crime and anti-social behaviour.

Three particular initiatives were identified as best practice and as such were to be incorporated in each BCUs' use of the fund:

## Operation Winwhistle

This involves officers making person-to-person contact in what are relatively isolated areas. Crime prevention advice is given and, where appropriate, contact numbers exchanged. In addition security marking items of property takes place (for example farm machinery, saddles, etc).

## Operation Magpie

This operation involves officers carrying out directed patrols in areas subject to crime, particularly burglary and theft. The officers attempt to identify potential crime opportunities and then make contact with the potential victims. By giving crime prevention advice their aim is to remove such opportunities for criminals.

## Operation Cobra

This involves directed patrols to car parks and areas which have been subject to vehicle crime. Signs are posted and special laminated leaflets are distributed (to be displayed in vehicles announcing that there are no valuables within). In addition, general crime prevention advice is given.

Last year farm visits led to an investigation into tack thefts. As a direct result, more than a thousand stolen saddles were recovered, together with stolen farm machinery and, in particular, trailers. Part of the ongoing aim of the operation is to raise awareness within the rural community so that they take action to

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reduce the opportunity for such crime. Funds have also been used to patrol crime and disorder hotspots across the two counties thereby improving the quality of life for those who live and work in these areas. In addition the policing of raves and hunts has been enhanced using the modernisation fund.

The three existing mobile police offices continue to be actively used across the counties. Two more are being fitted out. This will provide one vehicle for the Isle of Wight and four vehicles to be shared between the eight mainland rural BCUs. A bid has been submitted for a sixth vehicle. The main purpose of these vehicles is to regularly visit outlying villages and communities. The vehicle is parked at a pre-scheduled location. One member of staff stays with the vehicle to deal with enquiries whilst the other performs high visibility foot patrol around the village. The vehicles are also used at fêtes and shows as a police contact point and further use has been made in relation to recruiting at these events.

In addition to the mobile police stations Central Hampshire BCU has now taken delivery of two community partnership CCTV vehicles. These vehicles are being actively used by the partnership in relation to disorder and anti-social behaviour hotspots. They proved invaluable when an act of criminal damage was caught on film on the first day and the offender was arrested.

A rural page has been introduced on the Force website ([www.hampshire.police.uk](http://www.hampshire.police.uk)). This explains the strategy and the various initiatives in detail, the intention being to increase accountability and accessibility to

persons who may have little day-to-day contact with the police.

A pilot rural safety initiative is planned for 2004. A problem-solving group made up of local stakeholders is appointed (for example residents, teachers, landowners, publicans etc). This group then seeks to identify local issues by consultation. The group endeavours to solve problems using local resources and by approaching other interested parties or authorities as appropriate.

The scheme is set up and overseen in the early stages by the local sector officer (who will have received training).

The aim is for problems which currently come to the police or other agencies to be resolved locally. Good examples of this are juvenile nuisance and littering. Although it will never attempt to solve core police business such as vehicle crime, in other forces it has reduced demand for less serious issues which in turn frees up police time to concentrate on service plan objectives.

The rural grant from the Government for 2004/05 will be £219,000. The fund will continue to be directed towards specific initiatives to achieve the aims of the rural strategy. In particular improved performance is sought in relation to user satisfaction (SPI 1), confidence measures (SPI 2), reduction of crime, particularly vehicle crime, and burglary (SPI 5); and a reduction in anti-social behaviour and disorder (SPI 10).