

Introduction:

APPENDIX E

Hampshire Police Authority has attended a number of rural events in the past 18 months¹. The feedback from members of the public at these events raised a number of concerns about the police service that rural residents received from Hampshire Constabulary. To address these concerns and listen to representatives from rural communities, Hampshire Police Authority hosted an engagement event at its offices in Winchester, on Wednesday 06th October 2010.

Aim:

The overarching aim of Police Authority Community Engagement is to ensure policing by consent by reflecting the views of local people in the setting of policing priorities.

The Police Authority has a statutory duty to engage with the public. By listening to the views of people from across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, the Authority can ensure that policies on policing reflect the services people need, and to this end, the results of all engagement exercises undertaken in 2010/11 are fed into the Policing Plan process and help shape future policing priorities.

Objectives:

To engage with members of the rural community, to understand and ascertain their policing priorities, experiences and concerns, and to raise awareness within the community of the role and responsibilities of Hampshire Police Authority.

Methodology:

We asked participants 30 specific questions using interactive technology. The technology enabled responses to the questions to be shared with all attendees immediately. The feedback and responses were then used to generate more in-depth discussion on the subject amongst participants.

Response Rate:

49² invited members of the rural community attended the event and included representatives from the National Farmers Union (Hampshire Branch), the

¹ These events included: - The Ringwood Show, The Alresford Agricultural Show and The Eastleigh Steam and Vintage Rally.

² The Police Authority acknowledges the sample size is small and therefore the results are not a true reflection of the entire rural community's view within Hampshire & the IOW. This piece of consultation is a snap shot, the view point of 49 members of the rural community only.

British Horse Society (Hampshire Branch), the Forestry Commission, Parish Councillors and others.

We asked the 49 participants to answer 31 questions (1 of which was a test question)³.

About The Participants:

- 78%⁴ (38/49⁵) of participants were male.
- 54% (25/47) of participants defined themselves as being in the 50 – 64 age bracket.
- 96% (46/48) of participants did not consider themselves disabled.
- 28% (13/47) of participants, classed themselves as land owners, followed jointly by rural residents or members of an organisation that focuses on rural issues (both 21% (10/47)).

Background:

Hampshire & the Isle of Wight are predominately two rural counties (approximately 85%). It is difficult to determine the true extent of crime within the rural community because there is (1) no agreed definition of what rural is, (2) crimes are not classified as rural or urban crimes (therefore there are no statistics) and (3) certain crimes, such as poaching, which maybe prevalent in the countryside are not Home Office recordable crimes, they will either be classified as criminal damage or other crimes.

Executive Summary:

- Lack of police visibility in rural areas.
- Perception that both crime and anti social behaviour have got worse in the last 12 months.
- Police response to anti-social behaviour in rural areas appears to be inconsistent.
- Concern over personal and property safety.
- Theft of machinery is a major problem.
- Police do not have the ability to differentiate between urban and rural crimes.
- Rural residents do not feel they receive value for money from the police.
- Perceived inconsistency in rural policing in the North and South of Hampshire.

Main Report:

³ Not all participants answered every one of the 31 questions that we asked at the event.

⁴ %'s rounded off to the nearest whole figure.

⁵ Figures in brackets denote actual numbers

This section of the report focuses on police visibility within the countryside, knowing your local officers and the methods used by rural residents to get into contact with the police.

- 60% (29/48) of participants stated that they had seen a Police Officer (PC) or PCSO (Police Community Support Officer) in their local area⁶ within the last month⁷.

Despite this high % for police visibility, all the participants agreed that the visibility of officers in the countryside was a concern. Many people felt that officers needed to be stationed in rural areas for longer periods in order to build up community links and understand rural policing priorities.

- 67% (33/49) of participants knew who their local PC or PCSO was.

However the participants did acknowledge that rural officers often had several communities to cover over large geographic distances making it difficult for officers to know and be known by everyone in those communities.

- 74% (34/46) of participants felt that they had the opportunity to make officers aware of any community safety or policing issue of concern to them.
- 33% (15/46) of participants would use the non emergency 0845 045 45 45 number to contact the police, this was followed jointly by using the non emergency 101 number and visiting a police station (both 17% (8/46)).

During the discussion that followed, the participants felt that parish council meetings and direct face to face contact were the best methods of communicating with the police.

The Country Watch text messaging service was found to be beneficial to many people in the audience.

One individual commented that “the text messaging service had made people much more aware of what’s going on in the countryside, it reassures the public to know that the police are aware of the issues and are proactively chasing criminals”.

In North Hampshire it was stated that officers rarely turned up to beat surgeries and that in areas where officers did attend meetings to listen to community concerns, nothing ever gets done about them.

⁶ Area defined as a 15 minute walking radius from your home.

⁷ 60% represents amalgamated figure of options “today, within last week and within last month”.

One resident commented “that catch phrases and jargon like the policing pledge were not worth the paper that they were written on, as promises are not kept”.

An example of this was provided. An incident of anti social behaviour was reported by several rural residents to the police, a promise was made that an officer would attend within 24 hours as per the pledge but not one resident heard anything further from the police.

Another individual commented that (in the South of the County) “the police in Ringwood are very efficient and that the Hampshire Country Watch team are very accessible”.

It was a shared view that having officer’s mobile numbers was a good way of contacting them when needed. Another individual commented that he had rung the 0845 number regarding an incident at midnight and that the police were there within 5 minutes.

The audience felt that the police response times to crimes and incidents was getting worse and that response times were dependant on where you lived and whether the police could easily locate you.

One individual stated “In the past, residents within the New Forest had called the police only to be put through to a call centre on the Isle of Wight, the operators don’t know the New Forest so can’t easily direct officers to the scene”.

The constabulary for many years has no longer operated a call centre on the Isle of Wight. This is an example of an individual who has had a bad experience of the service which has remained with him for many years.

This section of the report focuses on crime and anti social behaviour within the rural community.

- 54% (26/48) of participants felt that in the last 12 months levels of crime had got worse.
- 44% (20/46) of participants felt that in the last 12 months levels of anti social behaviour had got worse.

Members of the audience felt that whilst urban crime may have fallen, rural crime had increased considerably; particularly theft, which was attributed to the recession. In the past 6 months participants stated that they had spent considerable amounts of money to protect their assets.

Just under half the audience felt that anti social behaviour had got worse. This included incidents that would not necessarily be classed as anti social in urban areas but were felt to be, in rural areas. These included incidents of: -

- Dumping of industrial waste in the countryside.
- Increase in motorcyclists (tearing up bridle paths).
- Treasure Hunters (i.e. using metal detectors in fields).
- Night hawking, hare coursing, poaching.
- Illegal raves.
- 4x4s destroying crops.
- Youths on pedal bikes causing damage.

It was felt that half the problem was a lack of awareness of rural customs by urban individuals and that they needed to be educated about the countryside and rural life.

“Many people may not necessarily know that their actions were having a detrimental effect on the countryside (e.g. destroying crops)”, stated one individual.

One individual commented “that he had had trouble with travellers on the A31 (near Alton) who were blocking stretches of the A31 in order to race along it”. He stated that the police were aware of this but had done nothing to resolve it.

- 84% (40/48) of participants felt that the police were aware of anti social behaviour and crime issues in their areas.
- 73% (35/48) of participants felt that the local council(s) were aware of anti social behaviour and crime issues in their areas.
- 47% (23/49) didn’t believe that the police was addressing issues of anti social behaviour and crime in their areas.
- 60% (28/47) didn’t believe that the local council(s) was addressing issues of anti social behaviour and crime in their areas.

Within the (South of the County) New Forest it was felt that police were addressing anti social behaviour and that the Country Watch team in the forest was “first rate”. Forest Watch was regarded as an asset that helped get officers where you needed them, with the purchase of surveillance equipment, undercover operations had been extremely successful in the Fordingbridge area.

“Poaching is regarded as a major issue but the police had done a lot more in the last 6 months to try and tackle this problem in the Forest”, stated one participant.

However those in the North of the county didn’t believe that the police were addressing concerns. They felt the Country Watch scheme in the North was not functioning and that the scheme operated there was behind the times when compared with other schemes in the two counties.

“The North had to catch up”, commented one individual.

The participants felt that local councils should provide more youth workers to help deal with matters of anti social behaviour, as there is very little for young people to do in the countryside.

One individual commented “that the public needed to be made aware of the differing levels of local council’s responsibilities and which council is responsible for what. Parish councils are there to support the local community but they do not have the means to deal with all issues”.

It was argued other agencies also needed to do more, for example the Environment Agency refuses to collect waste left behind by fly tippers if it is on private property.

This section of the report focuses on public perceptions of safety.

- 39% (18/47) participants stated that they felt very safe, safe living in their local area.
- 42% (20/47) participants felt unsafe, very unsafe living in their local area.

An example of this was provided by an individual who claimed to feel unsafe when confronting poachers due to the poachers threatening behaviour.

“Actions to safeguard ones property are not always worth it as it is a lottery if someone is to become a victim of crime. If a criminal is determined, they will commit a crime regardless of what precautions are in place”.

This section of the report focuses on policing priorities for the rural community.

We asked the audience to identify their top 3 crimes that in their opinion the police should be prioritising. The results were:

- Theft of machinery 28% (40/146⁸), Poaching 19% (27/146) and Theft of fuel 14% (21/146).
- 37% (17/47) of participants felt the single biggest policing concern in their area was the theft of machinery.

The theft of machinery was regarded as being related to the economic climate of the country. It was felt that criminals were finding it harder to operate in urban areas, so were turning their attention to the countryside. An individual within the audience felt that manufacturing methods with certain types of machinery was part of the problem. Some tractors (of differing models) made by the same manufacturer could all be unlocked and operated by a single key.

⁸ 1 person choose only 2 options instead of 3 three, therefore the sample size in 146 instead of 147.

- 98% (42/43) participants felt that the police's inability to link crimes to rural areas was a big concern.

Due to Home Office counting rules all police forces within the country do not have the ability to distinguish between crimes committed in urban and rural areas.

The audience wondered whether this could be changed. If not, why couldn't Hampshire Constabulary locally distinguish between urban and rural crimes themselves?

This section of the report focuses on perceptions of public satisfaction and value for money.

- 40% (20/50⁹) of participants were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the policing service provided to them.

An individual commented "that he had found a loaded syringe stuck in the rails in a field containing horses, the farmer removed the syringe and informed the police but it was not until 3 weeks later that the police took any interest seriously when the syringe was produced at a parish council meeting".

Another individual stated "he had his tools stolen from his property, he reported this but there was no follow up action or feedback from the police".

One farmer had 2 tractors stolen on Saturday night, the police turned up the next morning and said "don't worry, your insured aren't you?" The farmer then had another tractor stolen from his property; in total he had lost machinery worth £270,000. There was no feedback from the police. The farmer went on to say "that if £270,000 had been stolen from a bank or post office it would be treated as a major crime and thoroughly investigated".

"Most police officers will tell you not to worry and then respond by saying your insured anyway. This is not the type of response that any victim of crime would want to hear", stated one participant.

"The lack of police response to rural crimes only goes further to dissuade others from reporting crimes because they believe nothing will happen" stated a participant.

"The police are not interested in investigating the theft of small items of value, even though the theft of these items can have a big impact on the victim", commented one individual.

⁹ An extra participant, who was not part of the sample choose to answer this question.

“If I call to say there has been an explosion or fire arms incident it will get a quicker response however if it is anything else then the response rate is much slower”, commented another individual.

- 56% (28/50¹⁰) of participants felt that the police did not provide value for money in relation to policing in their area.

One participant commented that “the police don’t provide value for money because when you phone to report a crime, all you get is a crime number. The police don’t react to the problem”.

Some people asked where it had all gone wrong. Looking back at policing 30 years ago, they stated that 30 years ago every rural community had a rural officer. A response to the comments made was that “30 years ago, criminals were doing it for the pot, nowadays there is big money to be made from criminal activity in rural areas”.

The participants felt that there needed to be greater communication, co-operation and dialogue between neighbouring Forces as this seemed to be non – existent at the moment and which criminals were exploiting. The police needed to have a better relationship with port authority’s as a large percentage of stolen machinery from rural communities is shipped abroad according to participants. Serious organised crime is a serious problem that is hastening the theft of machinery.

“If organised criminals can get, heavy stolen machinery to the ports quick enough, they can get away with it” stated one participant.

- 57% (25/44) of participants felt there were areas of work that the police should no longer focus on doing.

These included Home Office statistics and investigating industrial accidents (this should be left to the Health & Safety executive).

- 81% (38/47) of participants felt that local communities could do more to keep their local areas safe.

One individual commented that “if people get too involved in situations they are told not to interfere”.

But the majority of the participants felt that they could help the police by being vigilant, by providing intelligence, by joining neighbourhood watch or similar schemes. Land owners or famers could provide land to build and provide affordable housing for police officers to live in, was another view aired.

¹⁰ An extra participant, who was not part of the sample choose to answer this question.

This section of the report focuses on victims of crime and fears about becoming victims.

- 71% (35/49) of participants had been victims of crime in the past 12 months.
- 91% (32/35) of participants reported the crime to the police.
- 46% (16/35) were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the response from the police
- 84% (41/49) of participants are worried about becoming victims of crime.

“One participant stated that he’d been a farmer for 14 years and had been a victim of crime every year of those 14 years and that some crimes had been major”.

Another farmer commented “there are assets out there that you simply can’t protect” he expects to be a victim of crime sooner or later.

Another individual commented “I am worried about the cost of the disruption to my business if I do become a victim of crime”.

“Because I am worried about crime, it slows down my day to day job as I am constantly securing equipment and then unsecuring it when I need it”.

Some individuals felt that there is nothing to give the rural community reassurance that their needs are being addressed by the police.

About the Event:

- 59% (29/49) of participants were either aware fully or partially of Hampshire Police Authority.
- 79% (38/48) of participants felt it important to have an independent body to scrutinise and monitor the work of Hampshire Constabulary on behalf of the general public.
- 92% (44/48) of participants rated the event as either excellent or good.
- 96% (45/47) of participants would be interested in attending a similar event if the police authority was to organise one in the future.

Conclusions:

There is a genuine perception within the rural community of a North / South divide in the level of service provided by the police in the county. The police are not necessarily always visible in the countryside due to the large geographic areas that they have to cover.

The police are unable to (at present) distinguish between urban and rural crimes. Participant all agreed that a simple process is needed to identify rural crimes, this could be based on postcodes and the statistics that are recorded then needed to be shared with rural communities.

The rural community across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight need feedback from the police about the actions they are taking to tackle the crimes, anti-social behaviour and concerns raised; not only within this event but also by individuals across the countryside generally. The police need to communicate effectively with the rural community the positive outcomes that have resulted as a result of police actions.

Follow-Up Action: -

- 1). To forward a copy to all participants.
- 2). To forward a copy of the report and its findings to the Chief Inspector that heads the Rural Issues Practitioners' Group (RIPG) and Assistant Chief Constable Territorial Operations.
- 3). To present this report and its findings at the next Community Engagement Committee meeting (25/10/10).
- 4). To feed the findings of this event into the process that develops the annual policing plan to help shape policing priorities in 2011 and beyond.