



**West  
Yorkshire  
Policing  
& Crime**

**Tracy  
Brabin  
Mayor of  
West Yorkshire**



**Alison Lowe  
Deputy Mayor for  
Policing & Crime**

**Item 6**

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**Report to:** Police and Crime Panel

**Date:** 01 March 2024

**Subject:** **Rural Crime**

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**Report of:** Alison Lowe, Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime

**Author:** Policing and Crime Team, West Yorkshire Combined Authority

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## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

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- 1.1 This paper reviews the topic of rural crime in West Yorkshire. As a major urban area, West Yorkshire's rural population is relatively small. Nonetheless, communities in Calderdale, northern Bradford and Leeds, southeast Wakefield, and the Holme Valley have significant farming and rural communities which experience crime that calls on the specialised skills of members of their local Neighbourhood Police Teams (NPTs).
- 1.2 This report seeks to raise awareness of West Yorkshire Police's (WYP) work in these areas; review current trends in rural crime; and highlight opportunities for councillors and members of rural communities to engage with local crime prevention programmes.

## **2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

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2.1 Most Rural Crime offences fall into one of four categories:

- **Agricultural:** offences relating to working farms, farm machinery, farm buildings and smallholdings. Can include theft of equipment or fuel, damage to property, and livestock worrying.
- **Equine:** includes working stables and equestrian centres and includes offences like tack theft and livestock worrying.
- **Wildlife:** includes hare coursing, poaching, and interfering with protected species.
- **Heritage:** defined as 'any offence which harms the value of Britain's heritage assets and their settings to this and future generations'. That can include offences like lead theft from churches, damage to ancient monuments, and illegal metal detecting.

2.2 Rural crime is often linked to Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) that target and

exploit rural communities across a range of crime types, for example; organised plant theft, livestock theft, burglaries (targeting firearms), poaching, and hare coursing (wildlife crime). Significantly for rural communities, the persecution of wildlife can include the use of firearms and the damaging of farm property and crops.

- 2.3 Other offences which can affect rural communities are environmental crime (e.g. illegal waste dumping, fly tipping, and polluting watercourses), and the anti-social use of off-road bikes and quad bikes.

### 3. RECORDED RURAL CRIME 2022-2023

- 3.1 Between 2022 and 2023 there have been increases in recorded Rural Crime across the Force. Albeit some of these percentage increases equate to small volumes of reported crime. These increases have been prevalent in Wakefield, Leeds, Kirklees, and Calderdale districts.

- 3.2 Key areas where WYP have recorded rural crimes during 2023 are listed below, but the number of offences remains relatively low. The list below ranges from 35 to 17 offences per ward between 2022-23:

- Ackworth, North Elmsall and Upton (Wakefield)
- Worth Valley (Bradford)
- Harewood (Leeds)
- Calder (Calderdale)
- Ryburn (Calderdale)
- Holme Valley South (Kirklees)
- Colne Valley (Kirklees)

- 3.3 Reporting of Agricultural Crime has increased dramatically during the year compared to the same reporting period in 2022. Whilst there is a slight decrease in the reporting of Equine crime and Fuel thefts.

|                                | Force |      |        |          |
|--------------------------------|-------|------|--------|----------|
|                                | 2022  | 2023 | Change | % Change |
| <b>Total crime</b>             | 503   | 855  | 352    | 70.0%    |
| <i>Burglary</i>                | 164   | 183  | 19     | 11.6%    |
| <i>Criminal damage</i>         | 60    | 144  | 84     | 140.0%   |
| <i>Violence without injury</i> | 14    | 32   | 18     | 128.6%   |
| <i>Violence with injury</i>    | 18    | 30   | 12     | 66.7%    |
| <i>Other theft</i>             | 107   | 143  | 36     | 33.6%    |
| <i>Other crime</i>             | 140   | 323  | 183    | 130.7%   |
| <b>Property type</b>           |       |      |        |          |
| AGRICULTURAL                   | 12    | 215  | 203    | 1691.7%  |
| BUILDING MATERIALS             | 49    | 64   | 15     | 30.6%    |
| FARM EQUIPMENT                 | 67    | 78   | 11     | 16.4%    |
| BUILDING & BUILDING MATERIALS  | 40    | 64   | 24     | 60.0%    |
| FUEL                           | 8     | 7    | -1     | -12.5%   |
| SHEEP                          | 9     | 11   | 2      | 22.2%    |
| POULTRY                        | 9     | 10   | 1      | 11.1%    |
| EQUINE                         | 11    | 9    | -2     | -18.2%   |

|  | Bradford |      | Calderdale |      | Kirklees |      | Leeds |      | Wakefield |      |
|--|----------|------|------------|------|----------|------|-------|------|-----------|------|
|  | 2022     | 2023 | 2022       | 2023 | 2022     | 2023 | 2022  | 2023 | 2022      | 2023 |
|  | 123      | 187  | 92         | 133  | 89       | 138  | 128   | 241  | 71        | 156  |
|  | 47       | 48   | 41         | 42   | 19       | 29   | 43    | 45   | 14        | 19   |
|  | 14       | 24   | 8          | 17   | 9        | 21   | 20    | 46   | 9         | 36   |
|  | 3        | 6    | 5          | 5    | 3        | 1    | 2     | 12   | 1         | 8    |
|  | 2        | 6    | 2          | 7    | 8        | 4    | 4     | 11   | 2         | 2    |
|  | 23       | 25   | 19         | 25   | 28       | 26   | 22    | 44   | 15        | 23   |
|  | 34       | 78   | 17         | 37   | 22       | 57   | 37    | 83   | 30        | 68   |
|  | 2        | 38   | 2          | 23   | 4        | 37   | 4     | 68   | 0         | 49   |
|  | 12       | 17   | 7          | 14   | 4        | 7    | 19    | 19   | 7         | 7    |
|  | 11       | 11   | 17         | 9    | 9        | 8    | 14    | 26   | 16        | 24   |
|  | 8        | 17   | 6          | 14   | 4        | 7    | 15    | 19   | 7         | 7    |
|  | 0        | 1    | 1          | 1    | 0        | 0    | 6     | 4    | 1         | 1    |
|  | 3        | 3    | 3          | 3    | 1        | 4    | 2     | 1    | 0         | 0    |
|  | 2        | 2    | 0          | 3    | 4        | 3    | 1     | 1    | 2         | 1    |
|  | 4        | 1    | 2          | 2    | 1        | 0    | 3     | 3    | 1         | 3    |

**Note:** Information recorded represents the number of crimes recorded on police systems during the period which occurred at a 'FARM' (FARMHOUSE) or featured 'AGRICULTURAL' equipment or 'LIVESTOCK'.

#### 4. ANTI-SOCIAL USE OF OFF-ROAD MOTORBIKES AND QUAD BIKES

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- 4.1 The anti-social use of off-road bikes and quads is a nuisance in both urban and rural areas of West Yorkshire, and tackling this issue features as a priority in most Neighbourhood Policing areas with a rural footprint. The use of such vehicles clearly impacts on rural areas and farmland, especially where it leads to trespass and damage of crops and hedgerows.
- 4.2 Off road motorbike teams across the force with the support of Roads Policing target the anti-social use of motor and quad bikes on farmland utilising Section 59 of the Police Reform Act to good effect. This allows the police to seize motor vehicles which are being driven inconsiderately or carelessly on a road or other public place. Locally this will often feature as a Neighbourhood Team priority and will be raised at the tasking meeting for a wider partnership approach involving RSPCA, National Trust and West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service. WYP's local responses have included 'days of action' which are well supported by roads policing, WYP district off-road bike teams, and Local Authority partners.
- 4.3 In addition, with input from the Combined Authority, WYP secured funding through the Government's Safer Streets Fund 4 (SSF4) for 2022 to 2024 with a further bid through Safer Streets 5 for Kirklees and Bradford districts for 2023 to 2025. This funding was allocated in partnership with the Local Authority to tackle nuisance motorcycles and quad bikes relating to rural crime.

#### 5. WEST YORKSHIRE POLICE RESPONSES

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- 5.1 WYP have approximately twenty-one trained PCs (Police Constables) and PCSOs (Police Community Support Officers) across the Force that are subject matter experts for all rural and wildlife crime.
- 5.2 WYP have three rural and wildlife crime trained CSIs (Crime Scene Investigators) to forensically manage scenes where wildlife crime has occurred and forensic opportunities are identified. Rural Crime forms part of intelligence-led ward-based tasking within the NPTs.

##### **Wildlife Crime**

- 5.3 Wildlife crime can include the poaching of hares, deer, or fish, or the persecution of badgers, bats, or birds of prey. Wildlife offences also include the theft of birds' eggs, or the illegal trade of endangered animals or related animal products (e.g. ivory, rhino horn).
- 5.4 The West Yorkshire dimension of these offences is often the persecution of badgers or waterfowl, or the hunting of animals after dark with dogs or firearms (e.g. 'lamping').
- 5.5 WYP's specialist officers will collaborate with partner agencies such as the NFU (National Farmers Union), RSPB, RSPCA, Angling Agency, Environment Agency, the Wildlife Trust, and local interest groups to build the most effective response to wildlife offences in our districts.
- 5.6 In the past twelve months the Deputy Mayor has met with the Country Land and Business Association to discuss rural crime topics, and the Policing and Crime team have previously worked to support Anti-Hare Coursing campaigns.

- 5.7 The WYCA Policing and Crime Team continue to provide a link between rural communities and their Neighbourhood Police Teams through our casework inbox.

### **Crime Prevention**

- 5.8 WYP work in partnership with local authorities, WYFRS, Yorkshire Water, and third sector organisations to educate and provide intervention and prevention to the public and rural communities.
- 5.9 Crime prevention strategies are particularly important for farm businesses with extensive boundaries in remote locations. Harnessing the strengths of rural communities through Community Alert and Farm Watch programmes provides a key strategy in protecting rural areas from criminals, for example through the proactive and real-time circulation of crime prevention messages.

### **Organised Crime**

- 5.10 Organised criminals have targeted high-value farm machinery such as Land Rovers, tractors, all-terrain vehicles, trailers, and horse boxes. OCGs often work across police force areas, and by working in partnership, WYP ensures a targeted response.
- 5.11 Recognising links between rural crime and OCGs (particularly in the theft of plant and machinery), the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Organised Crime Unit (YHROCU) have a series of Threat Delivery Groups which review key threats identified by police and partners regionally.
- 5.12 The last WYP ‘Rural Crime Problem Profile’ did not identify a significant Serious and Organised Crime (SOC) threat for West Yorkshire, although nationally, the theft of plant and farm machinery is recognised as a target for OCGs.
- 5.13 Leeds district has had a long-standing issue with Yorkshire Stone being stolen from pavements in Headingley. Paving in hot spot areas across Leeds have previously been forensically tagged with Smart Water to deter this activity. In 2022, 136 offences were reported in West Yorkshire compared to 108 reported in 2023.

*Appendix A demonstrates West Yorkshire Police’s recommendations for their 4-P Plan to tackle Rural Crime through Prevention, Protection, Preparing and Pursuing.*

## **6. CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

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- 6.1 WYP collaborate with partners, communities, and other agencies to identify and reduce demand and whilst working to develop longer term sustainable crime prevention solutions. Best practice is shared both internally and with neighbouring forces.
- 6.2 West Yorkshire does have pockets of OCG activity across the Force relating to rural crime, but there isn’t a significant SOC threat to the Force area. Reported crime and intelligence is actioned and progressed through rural area’s NPTs.
- 6.3 Preventing and detecting crime is key in maintaining confidence and trust within our rural communities. The nature of farming and rural communities can hold an advantage in preventing rural crime through community members’ connections with other farm businesses and local community groups. Working closely with NPTs to

establish Neighbourhood or Farm Watch schemes can deter criminality in rural communities.

- 6.4 From the perspective of the Combined Authority, there are opportunities for rural groups to bid to the Mayor’s Safer Communities Fund to support rural crime prevention projects. Bids from rural communities have been successful in the past, and the support of Panel members in raising awareness of this opportunity would be welcome.

## **7. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION BENEFITS AND IMPLICATIONS**

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- 7.1 Adjacent to major conurbations, West Yorkshire’s rural communities could not be considered as ‘remote’ as other rural regions of the country. Nonetheless, we recognise that residents of West Yorkshire rural areas can feel vulnerable, and perceive they do not have the same equality of access to public services (including transport, health, and policing), as those living in our urban communities.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

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- 8.1 Not applicable.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

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- 9.1 None.

## **10. EXTERNAL CONSULTATION**

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- 10.1 Not applicable.

## **11. RECOMMENDATIONS**

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- 11.1 That the panel note this report and the opportunity to promote rural crime prevention initiatives to communities, in partnership with the Mayor and West Yorkshire Police.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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## Appendix A: WYP ‘4-P Plan’ to tackle Rural Crime:

|                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Prevent</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crime Prevention to provide target hardening and security marking advice around storage of property types targeted, with a view to preventing offences and improving future investigative opportunities.</li> <li>• Rural patrols to focus on geographical areas highlighted in flagged intelligence scanning.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Protect</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop trigger plan for live-time offences where off-roading is involved, and costly crop damage is likely to result.</li> <li>• Crime prevention to conduct environmental audit of repeat premises identified with a view to target hardening/improving future investigative opportunities.</li> <li>• Rural officers to be made aware of repeat addresses which could be factored into patrol plans.</li> <li>• Rural patrols to focus on geographical areas highlighted in flagged intelligence scanning.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Prepare</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a flag for rural crime or alternatively rural officers can link offences to Op Molehill as per intelligence.</li> <li>• Awareness raising in rural areas around consequences of damage offences and the severe effects it has on livelihoods.</li> <li>• Consider posters similar to those produced by Crime Prevention highlighting issues identified in this report, particularly re. off-roading on crop land.</li> <li>• Improved signposting around private/public rights of way with a view to avoiding escalating disputes landowners and members of public.</li> <li>• Ensure awareness and use of Op Molehill flag with intelligence to be reviewed on a regular basis to identify both geographical areas of concern as well as repeat nominals.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Pursue</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider civil injunctions, Community Protection Notices or Criminal Behaviour Orders (on conviction) for repeat suspects linked to anti-social behaviour/vandalism.</li> <li>• Encourage use of CCTV at premises targeted with consideration given to improving ANPR coverage in areas affected with a view to improving suspect identification rates.</li> <li>• Investigations linked to wildlife offences to consider nominals highlighted by intelligence in the first instance, with consideration given to ANPR enquiries on vehicles linked to suspects and ACT markers for prolific offenders.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                           |