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Rural and Farm Crime in Wales:

Third Report (April 2022)



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Executive Summary

This report is the third in a biennial series of evaluations of the rural crime and policing initiatives developed across Dyfed-Powys; in addition to the regional examinations which have been published in 2017 and 2019, for the first time this year the survey was extended across all four police forces in Wales. Together with this wider focus beyond Dyfed-Powys, the current survey also targeted rural residents more generally – alongside the farming community – to ascertain their views on policing, crime and wider impacts from Covid and Brexit. A total of 150 farmers (60%) and rural residents (40%) completed the survey which was promoted through social media channels during November and December 2021 and at the Royal Welsh Winter Fair in December 2021.



Generally, there were positive signs that the Rural Crime Strategy for Dyfed-Powys and similar initiatives in neighbouring forces were having an impact on reducing and investigating crime; perceptions of the police continued to follow a positive trajectory.

Despite the challenging circumstances of the last 24 months due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the work of the police was perceived to be one of taking farm and rural crime more seriously; issues remain across all forces in terms of negative perceptions surrounding actual prosecution rates and more generally in establishing that a crime has taken place. There are obvious regional variations and survey response rates which make these inferences worthy of closer inspection.

Background

There is a growing interest in rural crime and the interaction with, and the importance of, rural communities more generally. The global pandemic and Brexit have brought to the forefront issues that have illustrated the boundaries between rural and urban environments; features such as food security, supply chains, and tourism, highlight how these locations must coexist. The countryside as a place of leisure during the Covid lockdowns brought many people into contact with rural police and rural communities, for example, large numbers of visitors to beauty spots across Wales and owners of second homes visiting residences from other countries during restricted movement periods.

The upward trajectory in terms of investment in police personnel, infrastructure and policy initiatives has clearly impacted upon the way in which rural crime is reported and responded to. In previous surveys, there was a dedicated section to evaluate the Dyfed-Powys Police Rural Crime Strategy and interventions introduced by the force. In the previous evaluation from 2019, positive responses from two-thirds of DPP residents felt that farm and rural crime was taken more seriously since the introduction of the rural crime strategy. In addition, 54% reported that the dedicated rural officers had increased their trust in the police and 66% of respondents stated that they are more likely to report a crime due to the rural officers. The increased presence of the rural crime policing teams was advocated as a key aspect of the short-term success of the strategy and is mirrored in most many other areas across Wales and the UK.

There are many previous works which argue that what is regarded as farm crime and how it is measured lead to systemic problems in terms of operational policing (Barclay, 2016). Rural crime – which can encompass farm-business crime and crime committed on agricultural land and premises – is a wider concept, but the broadness of these activities, which can include fly-tipping, illegal hunting, criminal damage, and trespass, mean estimates of the extent of crime committed in rural areas is largely equivocal (Laub, 1983; Donnermeyer and Barclay, 2005). The purpose of this research is to contribute to these wider debates on the effects

and responses to farm and rural crime. Due to the expanding and increasingly complex nature of local, national and cross-border crime, the survey for the first time attempts to touch on some wider issues, including wildlife crime and Brexit, across Wales as a whole.



Survey Methodology and Sample

The questionnaire was based on previously used instruments (principally the Dyfed-Powys Rural Crime Surveys from 2017/19), which have shown to be appropriate tools to make evaluations of policy impact (Norris and Morris, 2019). Previously, the surveys had included several specific measures around general crime and policing from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), alongside measures of social capital from the European Social Survey and the UK Citizenship Survey.



As in previous years, the questionnaire was developed in consultation with the rural police teams to adequately capture both policy and operational aspects of their work in rural contexts. In addition, close consultation was supported by the Welsh Government's Wales Rural & Wildlife Crime Coordinator, to expand the remit in terms of geography and crime type (e.g. environmental crime).

Whilst the previous studies did capture wider rural crime, they were predominantly focused on farmers; the 2021 survey for the first time also targeted rural residents in order to expand the focus on wider issues in these populations, recognising that they are not necessarily separate or distinct entities. Although the study focused on rural crime more generally, the survey was primarily answered by farmers (60:40), with approximately 40% of these

being beef and sheep enterprises and a further 34% sheep only farmers and is broadly representative of the upland pastoral enterprises across Wales. The survey was conducted from November 2021 to early January 2022, largely through an online platform advertised through the Police forces social media and at agricultural shows and events attended by the Rural & Wildlife Crime Coordinator.

The data is analysed in places with reference to the two previous 2017/19 DPP surveys in order to give some context to the figures. There is a separate analysis for DPP across the three survey data points, but due to the relatively small sample overall and disparate response rates this is not disaggregated according to individual force regions.

Key Findings

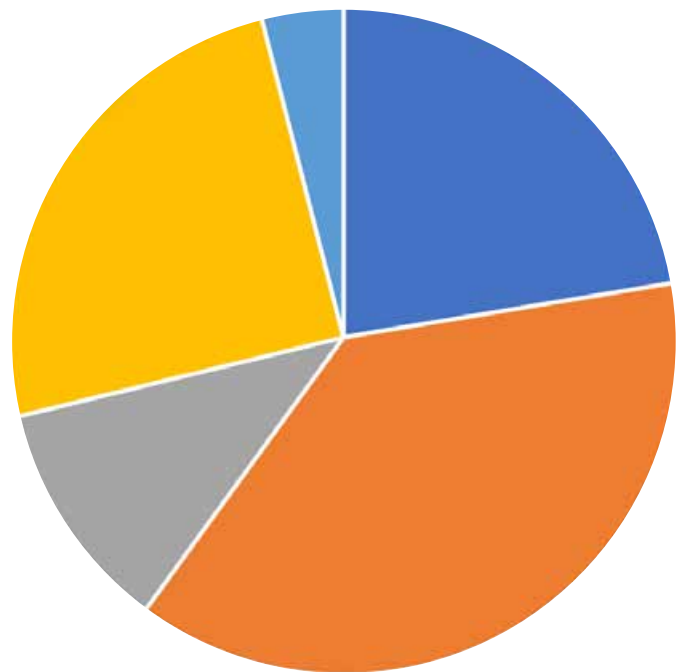
The total number of respondents experiencing a criminal event at their property was 55% - a slightly larger estimate to the 51% to those figures for DPP reported in the previous surveys in 2017&19. Whilst this figure suggests a small increase generally across Wales, the figures for DPP were similar to previous reports of around 50%. Obviously, these figures don't imply that half of all properties have experienced crime; rather it is an estimate over time of experiences of crime occurrence as not all crime is reported and/or recorded in official statistics.

As reported in the previous surveys, farm machinery losses were the largest category of crime (52%), followed by livestock theft (12%), and both comparable with national figures from NFU (2020)

Approximately 80% of these incidents were reported to the police. The way in which crimes are reported can be skewed, however, dependent upon whether they were insured losses or not.

'Percentage' by 'Type of Crime'

- Livestock Theft
- Machinery Theft
- Damage to Property
- Dog Attacks
- Other



Police Perceptions

- ▶ Do you feel that farm crime was on the increase? **Overall 66% YES**
- ▶ Were you happy with the way the incident was dealt with by the police? **46% YES**
- ▶ Did the incident lead to a conviction? **7% YES**
- ▶ Have your perceptions of rural crime changed due to Brexit (**77% No**) and Covid (**93% No**)
- ▶ Approximately two-thirds believed farm crime was on the increase

For 2021 across Wales, a positive response of 47% felt that farm and rural crime was being taken more seriously with 51% reporting that the dedicated rural officers had increased their trust in the police.

"Increased numbers of UK residents holidaying in the UK countryside have raised awareness, but also been the cause of more media coverage of rural crime."

[Dyfed-Powys Resident]

Similarly, 51% of respondents suggesting social media in particular had increased their likelihood to report; the use of Twitter and associated virtual networks was recognised as a key factor in developing awareness not just of criminal activity, but also resources and support (particularly the rural crime officers). Some comments provided with the survey responses suggested that due to the pandemic, existing networks had been curtailed or broken down altogether, and that social media had somewhat filled that void.

"The rural population haven't been socialising during the Covid-19 outbreak, this means the usual network has broken down, so news of incidents of rural crime and sharing of best practice/methods and gadgets hasn't been shared."

[South Wales Farmer]

Overall, there were six key areas identified in the data which summarise the perceptions of rural and farming across Wales:

- ▶ There is some apprehension over the perceived variability in police response times;
- ▶ Some encouraging signs that the public are taking crime prevention precautions;
- ▶ Potential concerns that victims do not hear about outcomes of reported crimes;
- ▶ Apparent lack of prosecutions persists;
- ▶ Overwhelming support for Rural Crime Teams generally;
- ▶ Understanding that police resources are being squeezed and challenging events.



Rural Crime Across Wales

Generally, there was a broad satisfaction with the police and their responses to crime. Issues around the investigation, gathering of evidence and the wider legal system were a key issue, with 78% reporting that the incident did not lead to a conviction.

"Because they felt the item was covered by the farm insurance no effort was made to recover the item or investigate the matter fully."

[North Wales Farmer]

Potentially, the pandemic may have further impacted on the investigation and prosecution of crimes, with many courts and ancillary services being curtailed.

"We don't get arrest successes shared with farming communities, all farm unions should get performance reports to feedback to members."

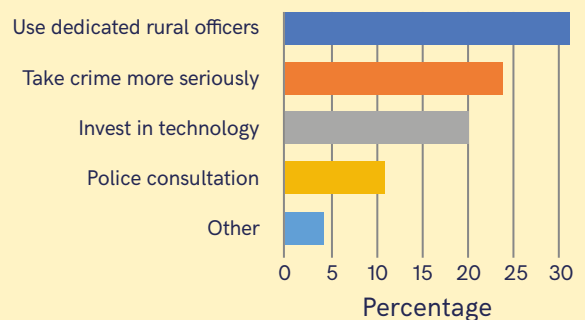
[Gwent Farmer]

"More use of social media networks"

[Dyfed-Powys Farmer]

- ▶ Satisfaction with the police **56%**
- ▶ Increase satisfaction in investment in technology **50%**
- ▶ Dog attacks were reported by over **30%** of respondents and one major increasing crime
- ▶ Over two-thirds of farmers had invested in crime prevention precautions

'How might police increase satisfaction?'



More wider issues were investigated in terms of specific crime types. Generally, about half of all respondents thought that illegal off-roading and quad bikes was on the increase, but these figures did show some regional variations.

"Illegal off-roading by bikes/quads is totally out of control in the area. It is unpoliceable and inaccessible to legal vehicles, with numerous escape routes over open country."

[Dyfed-Powys Resident]

Addressing other issues such as wildlife crime, was seen to be slightly less pressing, with approximately two-thirds of respondents estimating this had either decreased or stayed the same. However, fly-tipping – the illegal dumping of household and commercial waste – was seen to have increased according to around two-thirds of respondents.

"Fly tipping has increased with appointment systems at council tips."

[South Wales Resident]

Other issues such as illegal campsites, dog attacks and criminal damage/trespass were also reported.

Analysis of Rural Crime in Dyfed-Powys 2017-2021

The third survey was extended across Wales for the first time, but disaggregating the data for DPP allows some tracking of responses over time and understanding of how recent events, including Brexit and the pandemic, have impacted on perceptions of crime and the police.

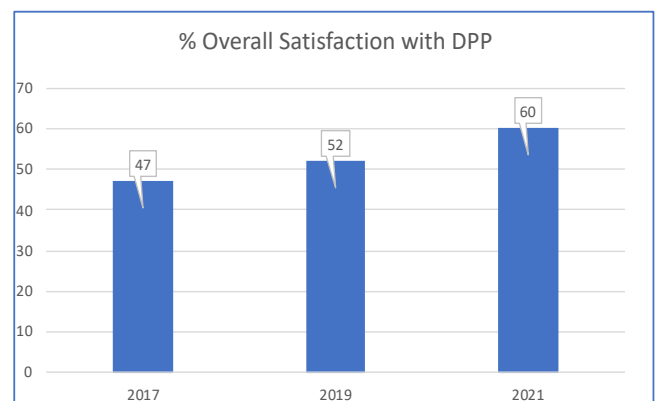
- ▶ Do you feel that farm crime was on the increase: **62%** (98% in 2019)
- ▶ Satisfaction with the police was **60%** (up from 47% in 2017 & 52% in 2019)

In 2017, around 91% of crimes experienced were reported to the police, but this decreased to approximately 85% in 2019. The figure for 2021 was in the range of 60% and recent events have undoubtedly placed a strain on police resources:

"Often long delays in attendance, due to distance and too few officers on the ground."
[Dyfed-Powys Farmer]

The fall in reporting potentially also reflects both a change in the types of crime (i.e. more general anti-social behaviour, such as quad bikes) as the major crime categories (i.e. theft of machinery and livestock) have remained constant.

However, there was above average satisfaction in crime reporting, with 59% of respondents who had reported crimes, indicating they were happy with the way police had dealt with the incident, up from 55% back in 2017 and only slightly less than 2019 (60%). Hence, as with previous years although fewer crimes were being reported the way the police had dealt with those incidents that were, was again positive.



"Community officer good relations in area"
[Dyfed-Powys Resident]

The main negative outcome measure for the Dyfed-Powys region – and common across other areas surveyed also – was the lack of perceived action in terms of prosecutions:

"Not aware of any outcome, not published"
[Dyfed-Powys Resident]

Nearly all respondents who had reported a crime indicated that they were not aware of the outcomes of their case; however, the communication and engagement on social media were highlighted as being a major positive of the force generally.

Recommendations

In the two years since the previous survey was conducted in Dyfed-Powys, there have been some significant changes in the policing landscape, most significantly related to Brexit and the Covid pandemic.

"In areas where there are a dedicated rural crime team, this seems to be taken more seriously."

[Dyfed-Powys Farmer]

Across Wales, there appears to be similar trends although undoubtedly some regional variations exist, and the types of crime and offenders differ, for example, due to proximity to larger conurbations and land use.

Despite some positive figures in relation to the manner in which the investment in rural crime has impacted on confidence in the police, there is still a persistent concern over the perceived lack of prosecutions.

The literature on rural crime generally supports this assumption and the complexities of investigating and prosecuting these types of criminality are well documented (Gilling & Pierpoint. 1999). Investment in crime prevention and detection technology is clearly one avenue to address these shortcomings, although ultimately increasing costs to the end consumer.

"There are just not enough police or resources to tackle crime in remote areas."

[Gwent Farmer]

"More could be done with current resources. It's not good enough to say they have limited budgets, embrace technology and lead the way."

[North Wales Resident]

Observations and recommendations from the survey respondents include:

- ▶ Need for increased investment in crime prevention technology, both by police and farmers
- ▶ Rural crime officers were the most highly rated aspect of the rural policing initiatives
- ▶ Dissatisfaction with rates of detection and prosecutions
- ▶ Targeting of specific crime trends, such as illegal off-roading, dog attacks and fly-tipping
- ▶ Increased engagement with social media for information and reporting, and wider networks
- ▶ Building awareness of impact of rural crime on communities and tailored responses



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