

Thematic Briefing

Rural Crime

February / March 2022

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1.0 Background & Context

- 1.1 Lincolnshire is a county of 2,500 square miles and a population of 730,000 people. The rate of Lincolnshire's population growth has increased in recent years and projections indicate that by 2041 the population of Lincolnshire will grow to over 800,000. The trend towards an ageing population profile will continue, with the proportion of people over 75 years of age projected to increase by 88% between 2016 and 2041.
- 1.2 The majority of the county is rural in nature, with a number of medium sized towns including Boston, Skegness, Grantham, Gainsborough and Sleaford, as well as the City of Lincoln.
- 1.3 Lincolnshire is also a county of choice for many tourists in the summer, for the East Coast holiday resorts and throughout the year for our rich history, beautiful countryside, and major events and attractions ranging from the Battle of Britain Flight to Cadwell Park race track, Market Rasen racecourse, Lincoln Cathedral, Lincoln Christmas Market and the Lincolnshire Show.
- 1.4 As Lincolnshire is a truly rural county, Rural Policing is a core function for all of our staff. Our Neighbourhood Teams and Response Officers are fully supported by Specialist Officers, including specially trained Wildlife Crime Officers (WCOs).
- 1.5 The force engages with representatives from local and national partners, including the National Farmers Union (NFU), Country Land & Business Association (CLA), County & District Councils, and League Against Cruel Sports through the Rural Community Safety Gold Group. The force has an identified Chief Inspector with the Rural Crime portfolio, and he commits to meeting local groups whenever possible.
- 1.6 Working with key partners, the multi-agency Rural Community Safety Gold Group is Chaired by the Assistant Chief Constable and maintains an overview of all issues which impact on Rural Community Safety.
- 1.7 In early 2020, partners were consulted on the priority areas for community safety in Rural Lincolnshire, alongside the Police & Crime Commissioner's Police & Crime Plan 2017-2021.

- 1.8 The Rural Community Safety Plan has seven aims which are aligned to the force priorities;
<https://www.lincs.police.uk/media/186203/rural-community-safety-plan-2021-23.pdf>

Stop Crime and Criminals

1. Target Offenders causing greatest harm to our Rural Communities
(Reduce Operation Galileo Hare Coursing incidents)
2. Reduced Theft of plant and farm equipment
3. Reduced Arson offences

Protect our Heritage, Wildlife and Environment

4. Reduced Heritage Crime and specifically theft of metal
5. Reduced Wildlife Crime
6. Reduced Fly Tipping

Help those in Need

7. Reduced repeat victims of Domestic Abuse and increase perpetrators brought to justice

2.0 Developments over last 6-12 months

- 2.1 During the financial year 2021/22 the force has committed to develop the service we provide to rural communities in Lincolnshire with a dedicated Rural Crime Action Team (RCAT). Comprising of an experienced Sgt and 8 Constables, the RCAT is tasked with delivering against the seven Rural Community Safety Plan priorities.
- 2.2 Recruitment to the RCAT has commenced and the final posts will be in place in March/April 2022. The force has sought to secure a mix of skills within the team, recruiting Officers with a passion for tackling Rural & Wildlife Crime, as well as Detectives and experienced investigators.

3.0 Current Position / Performance

3.1 *Target Offenders causing greatest harm to our Rural Communities*

- 3.1.1 Lincolnshire Police has the national lead for tackling Hare Coursing through Operation Galileo, now encompassing 32 forces. Enforcement activity during Covid restrictions included use of Covid-specific Powers, though it was noted that the volume of offending nationally increased throughout the season (September to March).

3.1.2 There are no centrally collated figures for Hare Coursing across the country, but all Galileo forces reported an increase in offending and enforcement. For the period September to December 2020, 1331 incidents were reported to Lincolnshire Police, compared to 994 for the same period this season (2021).

3.1.3 Of note, in the Queens Speech 2021, the Government committed to strengthen the Powers available to Police and Courts to tackle Hare Coursing. At the time of writing, amendments to the Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Bill are passing through Parliament, and anticipated to receive Royal Assent prior to the start of the next Hare Coursing season in September 2022. The detail of the proposed Powers have been prepared with DEFRA by Lincolnshire Police on behalf of the 32 Operation Galileo forces.

3.2 *Reduced Theft of plant and farm equipment*

3.2.1 Work by the National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service (NaVCIS) anticipated a move towards the theft of smaller, more portable items and away from large Plant & Farm Equipment (e.g. Tractors) as a result of challenges faced by the Organised Crime Gangs involved in their movement and disposal, through UK Ports.

3.2.1 This has occurred in Lincolnshire, with a series of high-value GPS equipment thefts reported, ripped from external mountings and within the cabs of agricultural vehicles. The force investigated and recovered a number of the stolen items, though some still continue to surface abroad, and we continue work with other forces and national agencies to tackle the problem.

3.3 *Reduced Arson offences*

3.3.1 Lincolnshire Fire & Rescue (LFR) are the lead partner for arson prevention, through the Arson Task Force (ATF), a partnership between LFR and Lincolnshire Police, which:

- Works with other agencies to reduce arson
- Ensures a targeted response to vehicle fires, anti-social behaviour and rural arson
- Raises public awareness of arson
- Provides intervention and training
- Records, analyses and shares data to assist in arson reduction

3.3.2 Advice is provided to farms through the ATF which can be accessed through the website;

<https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/business-fire-safety/arson-prevention/3>

3.3.3 The volume of arson offences in Lincolnshire is very low, but, though the ATF we seek to respond rapidly and prevent series of offences developing.

3.4 *Reduced Heritage Crime and specifically theft of metal*

3.4.1 Lincolnshire Police work closely with Lincolnshire County Council Heritage Team and English Heritage, with a focus on preventing heritage crime, recognising the impact that offending at or around Heritage Sites has on our community.

3.4.2 Innovative work by Lincolnshire Police as part of Operation History and Operation Dastardly, two investigations into the theft of metal from Churches and heritage sites, is being developed to better protect Churches in the future. Use of technology by a force Crime Reduction Tactical Advisor was key to identifying offenders, ultimately leading to their convictions (Operation History). This approach has led English Heritage to invest in our innovation and learning, to be shared across the Country.

3.5 *Reduced Wildlife Crime*

3.5.1 The force has a dedicated full-time Wildlife Crime Officer (WCO) and a further 36 Local Policing Officers and PCSOs with enhanced training to deal with Wildlife Offences. Pc Nick Willey, our dedicated Wildlife Crime Officer, was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2021 by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) for his dedicated, committed and innovative approach to conservation and enforcement.

3.5.2 WCO DC Aaron Flint Chairs the National Badger Persecution Priority Delivery Group and C/Insp Phil Vickers is the National lead on Hare Coursing – Lincolnshire Police are at the forefront of reducing Wildlife Crime.

3.6 *Reduced Fly Tipping*

3.6.1 Fly tipping is an issue led by the seven District Councils in Lincolnshire, supported by Lincolnshire Police and the Environment Agency. Lincolnshire Police are active members of the Environmental Crime Partnership (ECP).

3.6.2 The Environmental Crime Partnership for Lincolnshire (ECP) was formed in autumn 2020 when there was a very noticeable rise in fly tipping incidences across Lincolnshire over spring/summer 2020. The ECP has introduced Operation Asgard with Lincolnshire Police, where offenders are pursued, and their vehicles seized for forfeiture or destruction.

3.6.3 We have also supported proactive activity through Operation Clean Sweep - Intelligence led and targeted days of action to disrupt and intervene against waste crime, between ECP partners and others (Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency, HM Revenue & Customs), resulting in multiple vehicle seizures, prohibition notices and preventing large quantities of waste from being illegally deposited.

3.7 *Reduced repeat victims of Domestic Abuse and increase perpetrators bought to justice*

In 2018/19 Lincolnshire Police supported the production of the National Rural Crime Network report into Domestic Abuse in rural locations;

<https://www.ruralabuse.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Domestic-Abuse-in-Rural-Areas-National-Rural-Crime-Network.pdf>

In recognition of the findings of this report, the RCAT are tasked with a preventative approach and awareness raising when working with partners and rural community groups.

4.0 Forward look 6-12 months

4.1 Development of the RCAT skills, experience and capability to deliver against the Rural Community Plan priorities.

4.2 Continue the national leadership of the 32 Operation Galileo forces, including coordinated use of new Powers, in anticipation of the Hare Coursing Season starting in September 2022.

5.0 Issues of Exception – Opportunities / Risks

5.1 The rapid expansion of the RCAT is our opportunity to develop the quality of service we provide to rural communities. It is our intention to continue to provide enhanced training to Local Policing Officers in Wildlife Crime and other specialist skills such as stolen plant/vehicle identification.

5.2 Having played a key role in developing the Hare Coursing legislation proposals, coordination and use of the new Powers nationally will offer a unique opportunity to tackle this scourge of rural communities.

5.3 Sharing the learning from our Heritage Crime investigations is an opportunity to identify series of offences earlier and take action to prevent offending, protecting vulnerable locations.

6.0 Key Public Messages

6.1 Hare Coursing – If you see Coursing in progress, Call 999

#OpGalileo

We regularly find witnesses calling on 101 or delaying their reporting, which impacts on our ability to tackle offending. Hare Coursers remain in one place for a short period before moving on, so an early call gives us the best opportunity to locate them.

6.2 Take steps to secure your trailers and agricultural equipment.

#LockUpYourLandy

We are very clear that Rural Crime is the responsibility of the offender, not the victim, but we can all work together to make offending as difficult as possible. Land Rovers (Series and Defenders) remain a target for criminals due to their poor security and parts which are relatively simple to dispose of. There is also a ready market for flatbed and horse trailers, with long delays for the delivery of new products.

6.3 There is confidential and effective support available to anyone subject to Domestic Abuse across Lincolnshire.

We are also able to support perpetrators who recognise their offending and seek to change. For further advice and guidance on all domestic abuse related matters please visit our website <https://www.lincs.police.uk/reporting-advice/domestic-abuse/>

6.4 For guidance & advice on all rural crime matters please visit our website

<https://www.lincs.police.uk/reporting-advice/wildlife-and-rural-crime/>