

Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Rural Policy

Wednesday 24th February 2016, 5.45 – 7.30pm, Committee Room 4

Rural Crime and Responsibility

Minutes (Unapproved)

Present

Graeme Gordon	Rural Watch, Ayrshire (Speaker)
Gavin Robertson	Police Scotland (Speaker)
Rob Garner	SNH (Speaker)
Graeme Dey	MSP (Chair and Co-convenor)
Alex Fergusson	MSP (Co-convenor)
John Scott	MSP
Andrew Midgley	Scottish Land and Estates
Andrew Wooff	Edinburgh Napier University
Ann Packard	Chair, RSA Fellows Scotland and MCICH Network
Cathy Hooper	Penicuik house
Clive Harris	NFU Mutual Insurance Society Limited
Conan Phimister	
Deb Roberts	James Hutton Institute
Deborah Mays	DCM Heritage
Ellie Brodie	SRUC
Frank Beattie	Scottish Enterprise
Gemma Richardson	Bellenden
Ian Davidson	Scottish Government
Ian Macdonald	Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability
Jane Donaldson	National Rural Crime Coordinator, Police Scotland
Jimmy Gilchrist	British Association of Landscape Industries
Rob Smith	University of West of Scotland
Ron McNaughton	Food Standards Scotland
Ross McLaren	Scottish Churches Rural Group
Sarah Skerratt	SRUC
Siân Ringrose	SRUC
Simon Warr	Barnardos

Apologies

Jim Hume	MSP
Claudia Beamish	MSP
Rhoda Grant	MSP
Alan Laidlaw	Crown Estate Scotland

Ann MacSween	Historic Scotland
Brian Connel	Neighbourhood Watch Scotland SCIO
Claire Gordon	SRUC
Clare Slipper	NFUS
David Gass	Upper Quartile
Frank Strang	Scottish Government
Graham Blythe	European Commission, Office in Scotland
Julian Pace	Scottish Enterprise
Karen Dobbie	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
Kerry Barr	NFUS
Kyrsten Black	SRUC
Lewis Featch	Moray Youth Council
Lorna Philip	Aberdeen University
Mark Duffy	Scottish Fire & Rescue Service
Martin Price	Centre for Mountain Studies University of Highlands & Islands
Mike Strachan	Forestry Commission Scotland
Neil Cummings	The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA)
Nick Underdown	Scottish Environment LINK
Rebecca Dawes	Scottish Association of Young Farmers
Robert Phimister	
Roger Turner	Rural Economies Consultant
Stephen Graham	Highland Council

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

Graeme Dey MSP (chair and co-convenor) opened the evening meeting by checking that no participants objected to an audio recording of the meeting and photo's being taken. It was noted that several people were tweeting from the meeting using #RuralCPG.

It was noted that there was a list of apologies including Jim Hume MSP and Rhoda Grant MSP and any additional apologies should be given. Alex Fergusson MSP noted an apology for Claudia Beamish MSP.

2. Approval of the minutes from the last meeting (8th December – Healthcare Provision in Rural Scotland)

The minutes of the previous meeting had been circulated with the invitation for this meeting. Ian MacDonald and Ross McLaren approved the minutes as accurate.

3. 8-10 Minute Presentations (followed by discussion):

Graeme Dey MSP introduced the first speaker and opened the presentations with discussion to follow.

a. Chief Superintendent Gavin Robertson – Police Scotland’s work on rural crime prevention, intelligence gathering and law enforcement.

Gavin Robertson introduced SPARC (Scottish Partnership for Rural Crime). The partnership was set up on the 30th June 2015. They meet every six weeks, and membership includes NFUS NFU Mutual, Crimestoppers, Scottish Land and Estates, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Fire and Rescue, Scottish Government, Scottish Business Resilience Centre, Scottish Neighbourhood Watch and CONFOR. SPARC identified the key issues they felt were important to rural Scotland:

1. Contact with the police: operators may not fully understand the issue raised or importance as well as the location of the caller and ease of deployment.
2. Theft of vehicles, tools, equipment and fuel.
3. Theft of livestock, mainly sheep and the worrying of livestock – again mainly sheep.

SPARC is about having a national group but also about developing a strong partnership. They recognise that local delivery is important. Police Scotland now have in place 13 local divisions that cover the country, each has a wildlife and rural crime governance group. This is chaired by a Superintendent or Chief Inspector, i.e. a member of the divisional command team. They also have a network at Inspector/Sergeant level. Jane Donaldson was introduced as the National Police Scotland Rural Crime Co-ordinator, a position that has been secured through sponsorship by NFU Mutual. The key thing about the SPARC model is national standardisation and identification of policy combined with local delivery by those that understand the issues best and the context in which the solutions are delivered.

In terms of contact and reporting, SPARC have worked well with NFU Mutual’s call centres which have provided training advice for those unfamiliar with rural terminology.

SPARC has published advice in the Scottish Farmer as well as wider agricultural media and used the knowledge gained from NFU Mutual’s call centres for their own training programmes.

In terms of location reporting, rural postcodes are helpful but not accurate. Geolocator apps from mobile phones help to pinpoint exactly where the crime is taking place. Building relationships is vital across these activities. Through the activities of SPARC, the Police understand rural communities better; rural communities understand the police better and a solution can be created that fits the local need.

The Police like to concentrate on Prevention; Intelligence/Investigation and Enforcement (PIE) as preventing crime is more preferable. Therefore SPARC have produced a guide/leaflet to describe simple tools and approaches to increase the security of the rural environment and protect households, farms, rural businesses, golf clubs etc.

SPARC are also encouraging forensic marking with the Scottish Borders implementing a scheme for marking equipment and kit across farms and rural residential areas with repeat victims being allowed access first to the scheme.

SPARC have been conducting a number of crime prevention events across rural Scotland and have been working with young farmers and Scottish colleges to increase awareness and understanding of security issues.

In terms of investigation, SPARC now have a rural crime tool kit which is available to all officers across Scotland and enables consistent use of best practice.

SPARC have focused on high volume crime areas for targeted prevention/investigation which has seen positive results. Police reporting are also capturing all data regarding the crime including the emotional impacts, the time taken to build up a flock etc. etc. This information is particularly useful to prosecutors for informing them how to conduct the prosecution and in which court.

In terms of enforcement, as a result of the stance and steps taken, Police Scotland have seen significant arrests in the Borders as this was one of the key areas of concentration. In a recent crime series in the Highlands, Aberdeenshire, Fife and Tayside, subjects have been prosecuted, remanded in custody and have remained detained awaiting trial. This highlights that rural areas are not an easy touch and the strategies now being employed are working across Scotland which sends a very strong preventative message.

SPARC are making significant improvements and progress to date. This can be backed up by NFU Mutual who have seen a month on month decrease in the number of claims for quad bike thefts since July 2015.

There is still work to be done regarding rural crime and more specifically the set-up of Rural Watch schemes. Police Scotland would like to have a single platform for Rural Watch schemes so that they are consistent in their approaches and can interact with each other. However, given that the Police don't 'own' these schemes, it is harder for them to manage.

b. PC Graeme Gordon – Sharing his experiences as the co-ordinator of Rural Watch Ayrshire.

Graeme is a Community Police Officer based in Ayrshire. Upon moving to rural Ayrshire, Graeme very quickly became aware that not all crimes were being reported. Graeme wanted to set up a line of communication with the police and the rural community which resulted in "Rural Watch" (RW). Very quickly it spread to cover 1,321sq miles. RW crossed to Dumfries & Galloway and now has 52 members within D&G with a total of 618 members covering Ayrshire, northern Dumfries & Galloway to near Glasgow. Whilst these areas not part of Graeme's jurisdiction, if someone wants to join, he refuses no one.

Members are contacted on a monthly basis via email by Graeme, informing them of crime trends, what to watch out for, who to watch out for and how to protect and secure themselves. Graeme requires members to inform him of any suspicious activities on or near their properties. This provides the police with information about who and what is moving around the area which can be entered into the national database system which can contribute to solving crimes not necessarily connected with crimes occurring in that area.

RW highlights that the smallest farm suffers the same problems as a large estate which can give members comfort as they know that they're not alone. Graeme has also taken on the responsibility for being Police Scotland's wildlife crime liaison officer for North Ayrshire. Graeme has managed to integrate RW with this wildlife crime role through updating members on changes in wildlife crime legislation. Walk and talks were set up in 2013 in collaboration with NFUS and Scottish Land and Estates for sharing best practice for protecting individuals. A Forestry Commission event was also arranged to encourage reporting and showing them what to do if a crime was discovered aimed primarily at contractors and employees.

One of the main reasons as to why RW is a success is that urgent updates can be sent to members to request them to check empty farms and buildings for stolen goods. Members can help track down stolen items quicker and can cover greater area than the rural police which increases chances of finding the perpetrators. Graeme emphasised the importance of developing relationships with the rural communities and the RW network as these are key to helping to stamp down on rural and wildlife crime.

c. *Rob Garner, Policy and Advice Manager (People and Places), Scottish Natural Heritage – A forthcoming SNH campaign to raise awareness of sheep worrying.*

Rob Garner works for SNH's Policy Advice Unit and is Secretary for the National Access Forum which brings a wide range of work together to advertise the Scottish Outdoor Access (SOA) Code.

Livestock worrying is a persistent offense so SNH are currently working on a partnership endeavour to help raise awareness and convey consistent messages on sheep worrying. The focus is on education and awareness-raising and is a partnership arrangement between SNH, Police Scotland, SPARC, NFUS, Scottish Land and Estates and others such as Ramblers Scotland and Kennel Club UK; all of whom are represented on the National Access Forum.

Whilst the traumatic effects of sheep worrying are recognised, Rob highlighted that there is not intent in these crimes and that it is not carried out by criminals. The approach to tackling this crime was therefore felt to be best via raising the awareness of dog owners about their animals and how they behave. To do this, there are national and local press articles mainly run by SPARC; SNH are using social media activities and agriculture specialist press etc. SNH is producing a large number of dog owner leaflets being issued to every vet in Scotland to be handed out for responsible ownership and dog control.

SNH also have a campaign through 'Jess the Dog' radio adverts (see www.jessthedog.org.uk) in which a 'sensible dog' is talking to a 'daft dog'. This year the advert will be all about sheep worrying and will include the message that the dog could be shot if it is found to be worrying livestock.

There are limitations in knowing the extent to which livestock worrying is occurring, how these incidents have occurred and how many near misses there have been as in many cases the data being recorded isn't always accurate/complete. Many sheep worrying incidences are not from

recreational users but from lone/stray dogs wandering about from rural households. For future understanding it would be useful for more detailed information on the specific circumstances to be recorded so greater understanding of how these cases arise and how the approaches to tackle incidents can be modified/improved. The offence of sheep worrying is included in a piece of legislation dating back to 1953, which illustrates that the problem has been around a long time and can't be solved overnight – better understanding will lead to greater success in achieving the goal of increased owner responsibility. There are also additional benefits to working with dog owners, for example the 'nudge effect' of using peer pressure within the dog walkers' network to instil good responsible owners.

After the three presentations, the Chair invited attendees at the CPG to comment and raise questions. Key issues raised in the discussion included:

- ***Liaison with English counterparts particularly in the Borders area:*** Border divisions liaise on a daily basis with their English counterparts and Police Scotland liaise with UK intelligence networks and wider to learn best practice as well as sharing information. Furthermore, Police Scotland are engaged with Europol and Interpol given the international aspects of the stolen goods markets.
- ***Sharing intelligence and improving knowledge of rural issues:*** Police Scotland are improving their data collection and intelligence and understanding of rural crime. This information can be fed back to their national and local networks and thus improve intelligence gathering and information sharing across Europe.
- ***Education and next generation awareness:*** Rural and farm security training modules are being built into education courses in conjunction with land-based colleges such as SRUC in order to educate the next generation. Rural residents need to take more responsibility for securing their property and belongings to make it harder for opportunists.
- ***Livestock thefts, dispersal and gap in intelligence:*** There is a particular gap in intelligence in tracking down if/where stolen livestock enters the food chain for consumption, due in part to the dispersal of stolen livestock. Food Standards Scotland is setting up an intelligence and investigation unit to try to address this information gap regarding illegal slaughter and cross border activities.
- ***Rural Watch schemes, availability and a Single Platform (Neighbourhood Alert):*** Rural Watch (RW) schemes are not a Police Scotland responsibility and where these schemes do exist there are differences in their management and approaches. There is a drive to have a single platform for RW's to feed into and work from. RW schemes are welcomed and Police Scotland wish to support and benefit from these networks where possible. RW schemes have the benefit that 'near miss' incidences are also reported which can aid the crime prevention strand of making rural Scotland appear to be a less 'easy' target.
- ***Manufacturer responsibility for unique keys:*** Manufacturers are also recognising the need for producing machinery with unique keys to help reduce the ease at which vehicles can be stolen. This is on the agenda and is moving forward slowly and momentum should continue.

- **Greater awareness of dogs under close control:** The 1953 Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act was still felt to be fit-for-purpose and not to need updating, however, aspects within the Dangerous Dog Act could be utilised more to implement dog control notices. Under the latter, owners could be prevented from walking their dogs in particular areas and it could require repeat offenders to be muzzled. Greater awareness of these two Acts, the responsibilities dog owners need to take on board and increased reporting of 'near misses' would aid the reduction in sheep worrying incidences.
- **Report any activities that may appear to be suspicious:** The rural public need to be encouraged to report any activities that they think may be unusual or suspicious. There is still a perception that reporting something that may seem innocuous is 'bothering' the Police. However, any information can help fill gaps in knowledge or ongoing investigations which can prove pivotal.

4. Arrangements for Rural Policy CPG post election

The Chair, Graeme Dey, formally disbanded the Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament for Rural Policy given the Scottish elections in May 2016.

The CPG can reconvene with the same name and purpose within 90 days of the election. Office bearers will be required to be elected at that time. SRUC have expressed their wish to continue as the Secretariat. Following the election SRUC will be in contact with all members via email with the date for the next meeting and the Office bearers inviting other organisations who may be interested in taking up the secretariat to come forward for election at the AGM.

5. AOB

None