

Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Rural Policy 2017/18

Tuesday 6th March 2018 5.45-7.30pm, Committee Room 5

Policing in rural Scotland

Minutes (Approved)

Attendees:

John Scott MSP	Scottish Parliament (CPG co-convenor)
Graeme Dey MSP	Scottish Parliament (CPG co-convenor)
Colin Smyth MSP	Scottish Parliament (CPG co-convenor)
Inspector Jane Donaldson	Police Scotland (Speaker)
Chief Inspector Murray Main	Police Scotland (Speaker)
Sergeant Andy Mavin	Police Scotland (Speaker)
Chief Superintendent John McKenzie	Police Scotland (Speaker)
Andrew Wooff	Edinburgh Napier University (Speaker)
Joshua Bird	SRUC
Andrew Brough	Buccleuch Estate
Finlay Carson MSP	Scottish Parliament
Peter Chapman MSP	Scottish Parliament
Yun Chen	University of Edinburgh
Lyndsey Croal	RSPB
Neil Davidson	Scottish Government
Qing Guo	University of Edinburgh
Alistair Hamilton	SRUC
David Henderson-Howat	
Elliot Meador	SRUC
David Miller	James Hutton Institute
Edward Mountain MSP	Scottish Parliament
Danae Orellana Aviles	University of Edinburgh
Peter Ross	Dumfries and Galloway LEADER
Mark Ruskell MSP	Scottish Parliament
Sarah Skerratt	SRUC
Clare Slipper	NFUS
Jamie Smart	NFU Scotland
Clare Sturla	SAYFC
Kelvin Thomson	
Simon Warr	West Fife Enterprise

Apologies

Jane Atterton	SRUC
Frank Beattie	Scottish Enterprise
Jackie Brierton	Growbiz
Catia Buresta	European Commission
Nina Clancy	RSABI
Jane Craigie	Jane Craigie
Rebecca Dawes	Jane Craigie
Karen Dobbie	SEPA
Hew Edgar	RICS
David Gass	Upper Quartile
Sharon Glendinning	SRUC
John Glenn	Buccluech Estate
Stephen Graham	Highland Council
Rhoda Grant MSP	Scottish Parliament
Jim Hume	National Rural Mental Health Forum
Barbara Kelly	
Kirsty Leask	Soil Association
Ian Macdonald	
Michele Macdonald	
Davy McCracken	SRUC
John Mitchell	Anderson Strathern
Duncan Morrison	
James Ogilvie	Forestry Commission Scotland
Anne Packard	
Wayne Powell	SRUC
Jane Smernicki	SRUC
Rob Smith	UWS
Pip Tabor	
Roger Turner	Advocates for Rural Enterprise

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

John Scott MSP (chair and Group co-convener) welcomed everyone to the meeting. He noted that there were several MSPs in attendance including Graeme Dey, Finlay Carson, Colin Smyth, Mark Ruskell, Peter Chapman and Edward Mountain.

2. Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting ('The Rural Workforce'), held on 5 December 2017

The unapproved minutes of the December meeting on 'The Rural Workforce' were circulated by SRUC in January. No comments/edits were submitted. The minutes were approved by

Alistair Hamilton and accepted as a true record of the meeting. They can be found online [here](#).

As the action point from the last meeting, John Scott MSP noted that a letter had been sent to Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity, Fergus Ewing MSP, in December 2017 from the four co-conveners summarising the main points of the meeting (this can be found online [here](#)). A response is expected from the Cabinet Secretary on this, as well as the letter from the October 2017 meeting ([here](#)), in due course.

3. Presentations (circa 10 minutes each)

Each of the presenters gave a brief introduction to their topic. Their presentations are available to download via the CPG web page [here](#), with short summaries provided below:

- **Dr Andrew Wooff (Edinburgh Napier University)**
 - Andrew's presentation focused on the challenges, perceptions and contexts of policing in rural areas. He highlighted how understanding the differences between 'rural policing' and 'policing in rural environments' are crucial to evaluating how rural areas are policed:
 - Rural policing: is wildlife crime, bike theft, crime exclusively in rural environments.
 - Policing in rural environments: focuses more on the challenges of policing in rural communities; must consider issues that impact these areas e.g. domestic violence, antisocial behaviour, motor accidents.
 - Many officers in rural areas are working alone and therefore building trust with the rural communities is crucial. Officers must adapt methods and approaches to where they are policing (i.e. Dumfries v. Outer Hebrides). It may also be difficult for officers bringing their families into a rural environment; officers in these rural areas need to learn the 'language' i.e. making sense of a local community's needs/challenges.
 - Andrew also highlighted the 'insider/outsider' issue; in rural areas police officers are typically the first and only port of call in emergencies (e.g. snow). Officers need to demonstrate understanding and use negotiation/de-escalation skills. Discretion is also crucial, and this underscores the importance of knowing the local communities. This will help inform decision-making, e.g. whether an arrest should be made or whether it can followed up less formally later.
 - There are various challenges to policing the rural:
 - One is the centralisation of Police Scotland, which has fostered a move away from localism. Policing strategy is just beginning to push against this but 'knowing the community rhythm' can get lost when you get away from local policing;
 - Officers have subsequently had trouble getting through Police Scotland's new administrative/bureaucratic layers, losing their local contacts. This is also being re-established;
 - Internally there can be problems because policing rural is perceived as easy or uninteresting. So officers who are dedicated to rural find it difficult to get past the barriers created by these traditional perceptions.
 - Andrew concluded by describing how it is important we go beyond traditional understandings of policing in rural, especially stereotypes. The lessons from rural areas can be adapted to urban environments and police officers in the latter have much to learn from this.

- **Inspector Jane Donaldson and Chief Superintendent John McKenzie (Police Scotland)**
 - Inspector Donaldson began by describing how crime in rural areas statistically happens less. Priority crime areas are theft of vehicles and machinery as well as livestock offences.
 - There is a particular challenge with prevention and investigation due to the remoteness and a relative lack of CCTV and witnesses. There's also a degree of complacency because there is an expectation in rural areas that people will not be victims of crime.
 - This led to the creation of the Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime (SPARC), which supports Police Scotland's rural work nationally and locally through a dedicated work plan. The key strategic aims are:
 - Improving contact and incident reporting, which is intended to build up trust and confidence in communities. SPARC also focuses on local delivery, and includes 'crimestoppers' with a rural crime branding;
 - Improving understanding and awareness of rural crime, internally (for officers, i.e. some issues have not been dealt with before) and externally (i.e. improving understanding amongst partners and communities). Livestock theft is also significant. In recognition of these issues, previous silo-working has been joined up under SPARC;
 - Rural crime prevention is a key element of SPARC's work. There is a programme of crime prevention events (e.g. a dedicated stand at Royal Highland Show) with efforts around 'target hardening' – which refers to strengthening the security of buildings/installations to reduce the risk of theft;
 - Finally SPARC has a rural crime communications strategy with a strong social media presence and a National Rural Watch Alert scheme – this offers self-registration to receive crime alerts and other pertinent information.

- **Sergeant Andy Mavin (Police Scotland)**
 - Sergeant Mavin explained how there is a misconception that whilst wildlife crime has a clear crossover into rural policy, it's not specifically a *rural area-only* crime.
 - Wildlife crime is defined as:
 - The persecution of or cruelty against wildlife and interference with wildlife habitat;
 - Poaching;
 - Commercial activity in internationally protected species/areas.
 - *Not exclusively a rural issue.*
 - Joined-up working is key to wildlife crime investigation, as exemplified by Police Scotland partnerships with e.g. Cairngorms National Park. Nevertheless it is complex to investigate, especially with the internet, so there have been extensive discussions about using other methods, such as novel DNA techniques, to do this.
 - Another important element is that wildlife crime often generates lots of political/community concern. For example, an article on raptor persecution will generate significant spread in local and/or national newspapers.
 - Police Scotland has wildlife crime liaison officers in 13 territorial divisions, which has grown from 8 original posts, so the breadth of role has expanded. There is also a sophisticated central coordination mechanism.
 - Recent activities included a campaign in 2015 around encouraging the public to be vigilant about wildlife crime and to report suspicious activity. Primary objectives included highlighting what Police Scotland is doing to tackle wildlife

crime, to encourage engagement and education, and to promote the commitment to tackling wildlife crime.

- On this note, it is important to know what constitutes wildlife crime. It is *not* about e.g. stray dogs, injured birds or licensing of dangerous animals. Instead, UK priorities for wildlife crime are wildlife and bat persecution, endangered species, poaching, mussels and raptor persecution. But there is a huge range of issues covered by wildlife crime.
- There are about 250-300 legitimate wildlife crimes a year, but if you divide those by crime there is in terms of wildlife, officers have to specialise in various areas.

- **Chief Inspector Murray Main (Police Scotland)**

- Chief Inspector Main and the North East Scotland Rural Crime and Safety Partnership cover the North East Division: 3,370 square miles in Moray, Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen and 9,300 miles of road networks.
- It is one of the safest areas in the UK but there are still challenges. Community needs, especially demands on policing services, are reliant on detecting crime, but resources are primarily aimed at addressing vulnerability. Partner organisations need to work with rural communities to tackle agriculture and road safety, acquisitive crime (i.e. theft, robbery, burglary), livestock worrying, hare coursing, etc.
- North East Scotland has many historical and cultural points of interest which are crucial to economic and community wellbeing. The effects of crime can be more serious in rural communities and rural people can feel vulnerable as a result of isolation. These challenges notwithstanding, the standard of policing cannot diminish and cannot be determined by location. So Police Scotland must be agile and adapt.
- Demand for this type of adaptation is growing, which represents opportunities at strategic and operational levels to facilitate innovative partnership working. Hence the NE Scotland Rural Crime and Safety Partnership. This involves 20 organisations/stakeholders, and the strategy is focused on prevention, intelligence, enforcement and reassurance, and must necessarily reflect the needs and expectations of rural communities.
- Organised crime groups are linked to rural, heritage and wildlife crime. Further, acquisitive crimes are down whilst detections are up. Police Scotland has also increased wildlife crime reporting as well as detections. More people are coming forward and reporting crime which is absolutely necessary.
- In summary, the profile of NE rural crime is increasing. Communities must continue to support, be 'eyes and ears' etc. Police Scotland must raise awareness of the signs of rural crime, and must "tackle this head on".

4. Q&A with participants

After the presentations concluded, John Scott MSP opened the floor to questions from attendees and requested that individuals clearly state their name and (where relevant) organisational affiliation when asking a question.

- **Sarah Skerratt** (SRUC) said that a recurring theme in speaker presentations was that standards of policing cannot be defined by location but must adapt to it, and asked for speakers' additional perspectives on this.
 - **Murray Main** said adapting to the 'language' and priorities of local communities has been an "interesting" journey. Rural crime is crime that occurs in a rural area; it may be influenced by agriculture but it could be anything from domestic abuse to cybercrime. So policing and Police Scotland

- must be able to adapt to these circumstances. But it is a two way street; communities need to engage too.
- **John McKenzie** said a key point is that one of the successes of Police Scotland is the ability to provide equity of services across geographical areas. Organised crime/criminality does not have boundaries. Some crime is synonymous with rural areas but the reality is that crimes like domestic abuse or child protection transcend urban/rural boundaries and so Police Scotland must be able to react appropriately. Much crime is exported into rural areas so it is important to understand the impact of these crimes, i.e. rural crime does not have a singular defining feature and/or element.
 - **Andrew Wooff** mentioned how consistency is important. Police Scotland has brought capability to rural areas but the key is retaining a localism feel; in rural environments going to a national model has posed problems. Stop and search is another area where rural areas have not enjoyed consistency. But there is always an advantage to resourcing rural crime forces. Visibility and balance and trust are important too, especially when responding to things like mental health. Social media can help ameliorate the reduced the physical visibility that people in rural environments might experience.
 - **Andy Mavin** concluded by saying a partnership approach is vital with, for example, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and land management groups, which mitigates the effects of challenges such as not having CCTV.
- **Graeme Dey MSP** explained how he regularly engages with policing in his constituency. Police Scotland has boosted detection rates but he asked about convictions. He has heard anecdotally that the Crown Office is not prepared to pursue cases (e.g. involving badger hunting), so he inquired about the next step from improved detection to convictions.
 - **Andy Mavin** once again underscored the importance of collaborative approaches and explained how he meets regularly with organisations like Scottish Badgers. There are cases with technical breaches of legislation, but the advice is that there is no criminal intent so no criminal charges should be filed. Police Scotland has worked closely with organisations, but they sometimes do not recommend pursuing criminal charges. They are well-connected with Crown Estate colleagues.
 - **John McKenzie** added that moving from detection to convictions can be replicated for a number of crime types; the role of the police is to determine whether there is sufficient evidence that crime has been committed. Graeme's point is not specific to wildlife crime, and it comes down to the relationship between Police Scotland, Crown Office and courts.
 - **Kelvin Thomson** said there may be reluctance on the part of Police Scotland to put out appeals for public info when wildlife crime is being reported and investigated, and asked the panellists to comment on why they are sometimes not more proactive in appealing for public info.
 - **Andy Mavin** commented that there are actually lots of appeals on the part of Police Scotland for public information. In terms of partnership working, they work closely with RSPB and other organisations in raptor persecution. It comes down to availability of evidence in order to bring charges.
 - On this point, **Edward Mountain MSP** mentioned how one of biggest wildlife crimes in recent years was the deaths of many red kites and buzzards in Ross-shire in 2014; however, little evidence appeared to have been generated. There were many deaths reported but inquiries have not led to further action, so what has happened?
 - **Andy Mavin** commented that he had discussed in previous committee hearings how Police Scotland set meetings up with MSPs, and there have

- been further investigatory efforts, including putting out rewards and asking for/receiving some public information. However the statute of limitations has passed.
- Chairman **John Scott MSP** then asked attendees to refrain from asking about specific crimes.
- **Mark Ruskell MSP** asked how to manage resource pressures, especially around gathering evidence and understanding the priorities of local communities.
 - **Murray Main** outlined that there are 98 Special Constables in Aberdeenshire and their commitment is phenomenal. They live and work in local communities. But policing has changed, and nowadays we need to be policing people's homes. Officers do not always manage to build up the positive relationships necessary and the breadth of geographical area does cause challenges. However, in terms of local policing each local commander delegates resources as they see fit. Police also need to be aware of, and willing to use, new technology such as drones, as well as using available tools and local knowledge. They cannot do everything for everybody but if they prioritise then they can deal with the challenges. Mark concluded by reiterating that it is a two-way level of communication between the police and communities.
 - **John McKenzie** added that Special Constables are very valuable resources for rural areas. It is impossible to get to a position where everyone is content with what they have, but in terms of numbers, they are in a better position now than they were when Police Scotland was created.
 - **Jane Donaldson** also emphasised the importance of the Special Constables, and how they are often included in training with regular police officers.
 - **Finlay Carson MSP** discussed how Police Scotland is rectifying early problems (e.g. stop and search in Dumfries), and asked whether speakers would agree that local commanders have more flexibility to actually implement policies that are good for rural areas.
 - **John McKenzie** answered by clarifying that the amalgamation of all the Scottish police forces was never imagined as being an easy task. John stated that despite early challenges, the amalgamation has been successful. Police Scotland is now in a different phase; they value partnership working and localism as they always have, and commanders are able to make decisions about their priorities. He argued that you would find that local communities have a closer relationship with their Police Scotland divisions now than they had before. Finally, local communities have connections with legacy forces (i.e. the policing divisions that existed before the creation of Police Scotland) and these relationships cannot be understated either.
 - **David Miller (James Hutton Institute)** asked about campaigns, specifically whether Police Scotland intend to link to the current Year of Young People (YOYP) or the follow-up Year of Scotland's Coasts and Waters in 2020. How will Police Scotland exploit these opportunities?
 - **Jane Donaldson** mentioned how for YOYP, they are working to ensure the National Access Forum is joined up with e.g. Police Scotland youth volunteers. There are other examples too, but the key is engaging more with rural communities and ensuring there is an establishment of trust.
 - **Andy Mavin** also outlined how it is important that the perspective of rural communities is heard. A big part of this is getting people in on social media and The Youth Volunteers system is a good example of this at work.

John Scott MSP closed the discussion by confirming that the Secretariat would write up the minutes of the meeting and a letter would be drafted to be sent to the **Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity Fergus Ewing MSP** which highlighted salient points regarding the key barriers and opportunities for effective policing in rural areas.

John Scott MSP thanked the speakers for their excellent contributions to the meeting and to all participants for attending. Thanks were also expressed to SRUC for their support of the CPG meetings.

5. Date of next meeting – 5th June 2018: Technology and rural communities

John Scott MSP confirmed that the date of the next meeting is 5th June and will be on the subject of 'Technology and rural communities. More information will be circulated by the Secretariat in due course.