



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Making rural communities safer: Consultation on community safety

Anne Lawtey and Mark Deane  
with assistance from Nicola Chamberlain



# Contents

## **Introduction** 2

### **The context: community safety in rural areas** 3

Crime and fear of crime 3

The role of community safety partnerships 3

### **The research** 4

Questionnaires: the results 4

Desk research: the results 4

Good practice from the case studies 4

### **Conclusions** 6

Recommendations 6

### **Useful addresses** 7

### **Select bibliography** 7

1 Lawtey and Deane (2000)

# Introduction

Rural issues have moved into mainstream political debate over the past few years and months: the involvement of farmers in recent fuel protests is just the latest example. There is a growing acceptance that rural areas are different and need different solutions. This is as true for community safety as for any other issue.

In Spring 2000 Nacro published a briefing on community safety in rural areas.<sup>1</sup> The aim was to stimulate debate on how community safety practice, developed primarily in high-crime, urban areas, could be developed to meet the needs of rural communities. We pointed out that crime is different in rural areas: even where the issues are the same in rural areas as they are in urban areas, the ways they manifest themselves are different and so are the ways they should be dealt with. In addition, certain types of crime (such as farm equipment theft and wildlife crimes) are also specific to rural areas. Statistically, rural areas have lower crime rates than urban areas. Despite this, rural areas do have crime problems and these need to be dealt with.

The same is true of crime reduction. Community safety partnerships in rural areas face different problems from their counterparts in urban areas and require different solutions to those problems.

Following Nacro's initial briefing, the Countryside Agency funded research to develop some of the issues raised in the initial briefing paper and continue the debate on how to develop rural community safety practice. This report concentrates on one of the key areas in the development of local community safety strategies: consultation. In particular, we have focused on current levels of consultation in rural areas and identified good practice.

The full report is available from either Nacro or the Countryside Agency – addresses on the back cover of this executive summary.

# The context: community safety in rural areas

Mainstream community safety practice has been developed in high-crime areas, which tend to be urban. These practices may not always be appropriate for rural areas, which face different challenges:

- Some types of crime occur only in rural areas.
- Crimes common to both urban and rural areas may present a completely different set of problems in rural areas.
- Partnership working is more difficult in rural areas, which tend to have a lower population density.

In response to the rising interest in rural community safety and crime a number of initiatives are under way:

- The Home Office CCTV Challenge Fund is now open to rural areas.
- The recent White Paper on rural issues<sup>2</sup> highlighted crime reduction and the need for rural communities to have a bigger say in their own affairs.

## Crime and fear of crime

Crime rates in rural areas are considerably lower than in urban or inner-city areas. Fear of crime is also lower. But although the levels of fear of crime are lower than urban or inner city areas, they are disproportionate when compared with actual the risks of being a victim of crime.<sup>3</sup>

Some types of crime – for example wildlife crime and theft of agricultural machinery – are particular to rural areas.

Crime in rural areas can have a greater impact than in urban areas. For example:

- The number of **vehicle-related thefts** has grown faster in rural areas than in other parts of the country since 1991.<sup>4</sup> The loss of a vehicle in a rural area has the potential to be more socially exclusive than in an urban area: ‘In most rural areas, a car is a necessity and not necessarily a sign of relative affluence or advantage.’<sup>5</sup>
- **Racially-motivated crime** in rural areas presents problems – such as isolation, lack of awareness, low prioritisation by agencies and lack of access to support facilities – that are particular to rural areas.
- **Fear of crime** in rural areas may be increased by low levels of policing: there is a perceived lack of rural police officers and staffed police stations.

It should be noted, however, that the countryside also offers community safety partnerships a number of benefits not always enjoyed by their urban counterparts. For instance, ‘membership of neighbourhood watch is high in rural areas compared to others’.<sup>6</sup>

## The role of community safety partnerships

Not only is crime different in rural areas: the mechanics of the community safety process are also different. Auditing, partnership development (particularly involving partners other than the local authority, police and probation services) and community consultation are different and more difficult in areas with a low population density. This is exacerbated by the fact that smaller districts afford to allocate sufficient resources to crime reduction or employ staff dedicated solely to community safety.

Most rural areas have a two-tier system of local government: a county council and a district council, each with different responsibilities. This creates obvious difficulties: the requirement to mainstream crime reduction, imposed by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, is an even more complex process when two councils are involved. Many areas also have parish councils, with the potential to make the process even more complex.

Parish councils have the potential to be influential players in the community safety arena in rural areas:

- They are covered by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.
- Charles Clarke, Minister of State at the Home Office, has said: ‘They may also provide grants to police authorities under Section 92 of the Police Act 1996. They also have powers under Section 31 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 to install and maintain equipment for the detection or prevention of crime in their area.’<sup>7</sup>
- Home Office Statutory Instrument 1998 No 2452 required parish councils to co-operate with community safety partnerships.

The National Farmers’ Union, the Women’s Institute and Rural Community Councils are also potential partners and sources of information.

- 2 DETR (2000)
- 3 Mirlees-Black (1998)
- 4 Mirlees-Black (1998)
- 5 Countryside Agency (2000)
- 6 Mirlees-Black (1998)
- 7 *Hansard* Written Answers for 25 May 2000

# The research

Our research for this study consisted of three stages:

- 1 **Questionnaires.** We sent one questionnaire to 267 rural community safety partnerships. We sent a similar questionnaire to 405 parish councils, 25 NFU offices and 54 WI County Federations. We wanted to see whether there were differences between the views of local community safety partnerships and some of the key rural agencies on rural consultation and involvement.
- 2 **Desk research.** We read through 81 community safety audits and strategies from rural areas to identify good practice. We ensured that they included a spread of two-tier and unitary authorities. Where possible, we focused on similar issues to those raised in the questionnaires.
- 3 **Case studies.** Six differing areas were identified and visited for further investigation. Because of the differences in locality, history of partnership working, structures, etc, none of the areas visited would suggest that what works for them would be the basis of a standardised approach. However, they do offer a range of good practice that may be of use to other partnerships.

## Questionnaires: the results

The most worrying result was the number of parish councils that indicated they were not aware of the Crime and Disorder Act and its implications.

There are also a number of differences between the partnerships' views and those of the rural agencies on consultation, information-gathering and involvement in the implementation.

The problem of engaging with organisations other than the core statutory ones is of course not exclusive to rural areas. It does, however, seem to be more pronounced in these areas.

The results also raise the issue of how much training and support has been given to parish

councils, in particular, to understand the implications of the Crime and Disorder Act and especially their role within Section 17. It also raises the question about the ability of the normally unpaid/volunteer parish councillors and part-time clerks to fully embrace the Crime and Disorder Act and play a full and active role where necessary.

The results show that it has been difficult to identify rural crime and disorder 'hotspots'. This is no surprise, although there were a significant number who had identified village or tourist 'hotspots'. This is positive, as it shows partnerships can prioritise rural issues when the evidence is there.

## Desk research: the results

The majority of partnerships covered in this study clearly either didn't wish to consult as widely as the Act stated, or had difficulty for various reasons. A contributory factor might have been the short amount of time to conduct the process and those partnerships that were not already involved in rural partnerships/consultation found it difficult to establish those links.

Clearly when it has come to prioritising the issues, urban areas have been chosen as partnerships have opted for reported crime statistics that traditionally means rural areas miss out.

Few partnerships have included rural agencies at either strategic level or action groups level which is disappointing in view of the fact that the partnerships chosen for this study either have a rural/urban or totally rural split.

## Good practice from the case studies

The case studies within the main report suggest that the most successful partnerships have the following characteristics:

- There are good networks for parish councils and other rural agencies.
- Some areas of financial control are

devolved to the lowest level.

- Priorities are set and decisions made only after a two-way exchange of information and views between all partners.

Other specific examples of good practice include:

- **Training for Clerks around Section 17**  
Clerks to parish councils are often a consistent presence and can tailor processes and documentation to ensure demonstrable compliance with Section 17.
- **Training for parish councillors around Section 17**  
Some of the case study areas recognise that many parish councillors are key community leaders who undertake a large amount of unpaid community development work. These areas provided training on the requirements of Section 17 legislation. In one instance this was linked to the training programme for the local association of parish councils.
- **Parish Council Forums**  
Parish Council Forums, grouped around natural affinity areas, are used for consultation on a range of cross cutting issues. One of the case study areas (a large unitary with 170 parish councils) organises local forums, which are used for consultation on and communication about a range of issues.
- **Use of new technology**  
Several case study areas are investigating the use of new technology – such as video conferencing, e-mail and remote access

points – to reduce both the exclusion that can be caused by requiring people to travel for events and the amount of paperwork for volunteer parish councillors.

- **Co-ordinated consultation with parish councils in two-tier areas**  
In some of the case study areas with a two-tier local authority system, the county and district councils acknowledged that there were sometimes tensions between their consultation activities. A willingness to co-ordinate the process was developing.
- **Liaison with local farmers on rural-specific crimes**  
Several of the case study areas have worked with local landowners and farmers to tackle rural-specific crimes. This process allows relationships to be developed and encourages farmers to engage with the wider community safety process.
- **Using the media to highlight low crime levels**  
One case study area had issued a press release explaining why the area could not apply for RBI funding and stressing the low level of dwelling house burglaries compared with the national average. Another case study area was using community newsletters to deliver community safety messages at a very localised level.
- **Rural Action Teams**  
In some areas Rural Action Teams or working groups had been developed to ensure that the specifically rural aspects of community safety practice were addressed.

# Conclusions

Developing community safety strategies has been more of a problem for rural areas than for urban ones. Up until now this problem has gone largely unacknowledged by government. This situation cannot go on as it is: crime and disorder reduction partnerships in rural areas need to be supported, both in terms of adequate resources and guidance. We have highlighted examples of good practice in this report: disseminating them and enabling all rural partnerships to follow best practice will

be vital first steps in addressing the problems.

But community safety should not be seen in isolation from other rural issues. The most effective way of making rural communities safer is by coordinating action on crime reduction with other developments and initiatives. Recognising that rural areas are different and need different solutions is only the beginning. We hope that Nacro and the Countryside Agency can work together in the future to take these issues forward.

## Recommendations

- Community safety partnerships need to prepare now to ensure that they are able to engage with the full range of rural agencies in the forthcoming audit and strategy development process. They will also need to use a range of consultation techniques to engage 'hard to reach' rural groups.
- Community safety partnerships need to consider how rural agencies can assist with the next audit and what local data/information they might be able to contribute. It is important that these agencies are approached as soon as possible to ensure that they have appropriate information-gathering and information-sharing mechanisms in place.
- Training packages for clerks and parish councillors should be developed on both community safety practice and Section 17. These should incorporate 'distance learning' elements.
- Parish councils should be incorporated in local authority Section 17 and Best Value community safety reviews.
- Work needs to be carried out to establish the range of information for the next crime audit that can be collected from rural agencies.
- Clear and effective consultation mechanisms should be developed for the involvement of rural agencies and the various diverse rural communities.
- Community safety partnerships should learn from the good practice identified above.

# Addresses and bibliography

## Useful addresses

Audit Commission  
1 Vincent Square  
London SW1P 2PN  
020 7828 1212  
[www.auditcommission.gov.uk/comsafe/](http://www.auditcommission.gov.uk/comsafe/)

The Countryside Agency  
John Dewar House  
Crescent Place  
Cheltenham  
Gloucester GL50 3RA  
01242 521381  
[www.countryside.gov.uk/](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/)

Home Office  
50 Queen Anne's Gate  
London SW1H 9AT  
020 7273 4000  
[www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk)

Local Government Association (LGA)  
Local Government House  
Smith Square  
London SW1P 3HZ  
020 7664 3000  
[www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)

Ministry of Agriculture (MAFF)  
Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London SW1P 3JR  
020 7238 3000  
[www.maff.gov.uk](http://www.maff.gov.uk)

Nacro  
237 Queenstown Road  
London SW8 3NP  
t 020 7501 0555  
f 020 7501 0556  
[www.nacro.org.uk](http://www.nacro.org.uk)

National Farmers' Union (NFU)  
164 Shaftesbury Avenue  
London WC2H 8HL  
020 7331 7200  
[www.nfu.org.uk](http://www.nfu.org.uk)

National Federation of Women's Institutes  
104 New Kings Road  
London SW6 4LY  
020 7371 9300  
[www.womens-institute.co.uk](http://www.womens-institute.co.uk)

Tagish's Directory of UK Local Government  
[www.tagish.co.uk/links/localgov.htm](http://www.tagish.co.uk/links/localgov.htm)

Tagish's Directory of UK Parish Councils  
[www.tagish.co.uk/tagish/links/parish.htm](http://www.tagish.co.uk/tagish/links/parish.htm)

## Select bibliography

- Countryside Agency (2000) *The State of the Countryside 2000*, Countryside Agency
- DETR (2000) *A Fair Deal for Rural England*, DETR; [www.wildlife-countryside.detr.gov.uk/ruralwp/cm4909/summary/index.htm](http://www.wildlife-countryside.detr.gov.uk/ruralwp/cm4909/summary/index.htm)
- Lawtey and Deane (2000) *Community safety in rural areas*, Nacro; [www.nacro.org.uk/templates/publications/briefingListing.cfm](http://www.nacro.org.uk/templates/publications/briefingListing.cfm)
- Mirlees-Black (1998) *Rural Areas and Crime: Findings from the British Crime Survey*, Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate



**changing lives  
reducing crime**

Nacro is the principal non-governmental organisation for reducing crime in England and Wales.

We work with local people, practitioners and inter-agency partnerships to reduce crime levels, lessen the fear of crime and regenerate communities.

Our research, our work with Government and our experience of delivering services at a local level give us an excellent national perspective on what works in community safety and how to adapt and apply this at a local level. Community safety practitioners from a range of community safety partnerships use this expertise at every stage of partnership development.

Crime and Social Policy Section  
237 Queenstown Road  
London SW8 3NP  
020 7501 0555  
[www.nacro.org.uk](http://www.nacro.org.uk)



The Countryside Agency is the statutory body working to:

- conserve and enhance the countryside
- promote social equity and economic opportunity for the people who live there
- help everyone, wherever they live, to enjoy this national asset

The Countryside Agency will work to achieve the very best for the English countryside, its people and its places:

- leading with research and advice
- influencing others, especially central and local government
- demonstrating ways forward through practical projects

To find out more about our work, and for information about the countryside, visit our website: [www.countryside.gov.uk](http://www.countryside.gov.uk)

Dacre House  
19 Dacre Street  
London SW1H 0DH  
020 7340 2900