

OFFICIAL

A new partnership dedicated to tackling rural and remote crime in the North East and improving safety in remote communities has been launched.

The **North East Scotland Rural Crime & Safety Partnership** is comprised of more than 20 partners involved in rural affairs who have pledged a commitment to sharing their knowledge, experience and expertise to tackle the issues that impact rural and remote areas the most and the people who live and work in them.

The group will bring together senior representatives from organizations and stakeholders including Police Scotland, Food Standards Agency, the Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency, Scottish Land & Estates, the National Farmers Union and the SSPCA, focusing on areas including road safety, acquisitive crime, agricultural safety, live-stock worrying and hare-coursing.

The partnership will also supply ongoing feedback on the delivery of a new rural crime and safety strategy – which also launches today - to ensure the region remains one of the safest places in Scotland.

Today, we can reveal that across the North East: -

- Rural crime is down **34%** over the last three years;
- During the same period detection rates have increased by **10.5%**;
- Wildlife crime is down **32%** in the same period. Hare-coursing remains the most prolific wildlife crime in the North East, however incidents of Hare-coursing are down **80%** last year from the same period the previous year;
- **£127,605.00** worth of livestock has been stolen over the last four years with **£21,750.00** worth of livestock safely recovered during the same period;
- Livestock worrying increased in 2017/18 – up 8 incidents on the previous year – with detection rates also increasing to **73.3%** during same period;
- Over the past four years **63** agricultural vehicles have been stolen worth a total of **£245,119.00**. This includes **25** quad bikes, **15** tractors, **13** trailers, **5** diggers and **3** forklifts. The value of recovered vehicles is **£138,400.00**. Some of the vehicles were recovered in Glasgow and Merseyside, while another two were located in Lithuania;
- **25%** of cannabis cultivations have been within a remote or rural location;

- Rural housebreakings amount for under a quarter of all house-breakings reported in the North East. Detection rates are at the highest point in four years.

T/Superintendent Murray Main from Police Scotland's North East Division, and chair of the new Partnership, said: "There are many benefits to living, working and investing in the North East and we should be justifiably proud of our rural and beautiful countryside and coastal areas.

"I am also glad that the North East is one of the safest areas of the United Kingdom however we know that the impact of crime is often greater on victims in rural areas due to their remote and isolated locations, making them feel more vulnerable and concerned. This is why we need to work with partners, residents and businesses to keep people safe and ensure property is protected.

"It is important we collectively listen, understand and respond to what matters the most to our communities whether they are city, urban, rural or remote. The standard of policing for example cannot and will not be defined by location but must be agile enough to adapt to different locations.

"Moving forward our strategy will detail the prevention, intelligence, enforcement and reassurance measures we can take collectively to reduce crime by all the partners sharing their knowledge, experience and resources. There are still too many serious incidents on our road networks and we need to work closer with rural communities to tackle issues like agricultural safety, acquisitive crime and livestock worrying.

"I am very proud and pleased to be launching this partnership - by working together we can protect the most vulnerable and work hard to help those in rural communities who need additional support."

Aberdeenshire Councillor Anne Stirling, Chair of Communities, said: "The safety and well-being of people living and working in rural and remote communities is paramount which is why I welcome the launch of The North East Scotland Rural Crime & Safety Partnership today in conjunction with Police Scotland and many other partners. The expertise and willingness of everyone involved to play their part in making the region an even safer place to live will safeguard our communities for years to come."

Members of the Partnership include - Police Scotland; Scottish Fire and Rescue Service; Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen and Moray Councils; Ministry of Defence Police; SEPA; SSPCA; Animal Health & Plant Agency; Forestry Commission; British Horse Society Scotland; Food Standards Agency; NFU Scotland; Scottish Land & Estates; Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency along with representatives from Fisheries across the North East. Members of the Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime (SPARC) and Aberdeenshire Rural Partnerships Federation are also involved.

Additional partner quotes

Scottish Environment Protection Agency Chief Executive, Terry A'Hearn, said: "Every day SEPA works to protect and enhance Scotland's environment, helping communities and businesses thrive within the resources of our planet, including those in the North East. We call this One Planet Prosperity.

"SEPA is clear that environmental compliance is non-negotiable and our officers, who live and work in the communities they serve are firmly focused on working with partners to secure positive outcomes. We're delighted to be working with the North East Rural Crime & Safety Partnership, focusing on illegal waste dumping. We know that often it is not just the waste industry these criminals are involved in, and working together allows for better intelligence sharing between everyone, helping us all detect criminal behaviour and step in earlier to hold them to account."

David Fyffe, NE Region Chair for Scottish Land & Estates, said: "Our organization's NE committee and many members across the region will give this Partnership initiative their full support, recognizing that our network is well placed to help in the prevention and detection of rural crime, as well as the introduction of better safety awareness across land-based businesses. We will work together with Police Scotland and the other partners to ensure that better knowledge-sharing and co-operation can help deliver a continued reduction in rural crime here in the North East".

Lorna Paterson, NFU Scotland Regional manager, said: "NFU Scotland lobbies for all farmers, be they landowners, owner-occupiers, tenants and contractors. NFUS represent all commodities including: Arable; Dairy; Beef; Sheep; Pigs; Poultry; Renewables; Organic; and everything in between. These farmers are all at risk from the ever growing rural crime issues which can cause businesses and families complete horror. Thefts of vehicles, tools and livestock are prevalent in our region and the increasing dog worrying cases is equally

concerning. NFUS has been working with Police Scotland and other stakeholders in the region, sharing knowledge and building upon intelligence, with a view to mitigating this trend."

Dan Cadle, Community and Visitor Services Manager of the Forestry Commission Scotland, said: "Forest Enterprise Scotland is the largest landowner in the North East and we are responsible for the safe management of 58,000Ha of woodland which attracts 1.8 million day visitors per year. It's essential we work closely with the Rural Crime and Safety Partnership to protect our forest users from unsafe and illegal activity which can also impact on our core business of forestry which is a key part of North East Scotland's rural economy."

Pauline Anderson, Senior Animal Health & Welfare Inspector at Aberdeenshire Council, said: "Disease prevention is at the bed rock of all Animal Health and welfare work. Endemic and exotic disease in the national herd can cause huge economic loss to the agricultural community, disruption to trade and public access to the countryside. European and domestic legislation is in place to minimise the risk of this happening and to deal with any breeches.

"Aberdeenshire Council Animal Health and Welfare inspectorate is responsible for the enforcement of all Animal Health & Welfare Legislation within Aberdeenshire. In real terms this covers animal identification, records, movements and transportation of all farmed animals, horses and poultry. It also covers Animal Welfare on farms, markets, during transport and correct disposal of animal carcasses and handling of animal by-products.

"Routine checks are carried out at farms markets and during joint initiatives with other enforcement agencies. Reactive work is carried out as it is identified from complaints or intelligence gathered and in conjunction with other enforcement agencies. We have access to a number of official databases from which we can check and gather information. Much of this enforcement work is dealt with by way of advice and assistance, monitoring or by a formal warning.

"The inspectorate is a Specialist Reporting Authority and when necessary, report cases direct to the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service. Our ID and traceability work can detect crimes which may be of relevance to Police or other agencies. The team can assist Police Scotland with specialist knowledge to help in their livestock related investigations."

Helene Mauchlen, National Manager for Scotland of The British Horse Society, said: "The British Horse Society in Scotland is delighted to be part of the Rural Crime & Safety Partnership because this gives us an opportunity to work proactively with Police Scotland,

other partners and public bodies to improve the lives of horse owners and riders by sharing initiatives that prevent accidents and guard against crime. Our actions are very much educational and awareness raising and we learn so much from other partners, which when you are working with vulnerable road users or with important issues like responsible access to the countryside and dog control – is simply common sense. The equine sector represents a high value industry which makes us vulnerable to crime and issues like road safety, accident prevention and sharing intelligence become very important to us. Horses are not only an economic driver in the countryside, but they are an integral part of our society and so important to people, as such we must look after them. The British Horse Society would like to wish the North East Crime & Safety Partnership good luck and looks forward to contributing positively to this work."

Graeme Laird/Station Manager/Prevention & Protection/ Aberdeenshire & Moray/ Scottish Fire & Rescue Service said: "The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is delighted to be a member of this group and fully support the Rural crime safety partnership working closely with such a diverse set of partners to the benefit of our local communities.

"SFRS will work together with partner agencies with this initiative to reduce preventable fires and keep people safe, we need the public's help to achieve these goals. SFRS working in conjunction with rural communities, businesses and landowners will support the use of 'Fire Plans' to prevent major fire emergencies involving heath, moorland and forestry fires. These plans will also detail how we will respond in case of an emergency.

- Information and advice is readily available about preventing countryside fires, such as the Muirburn Code, which applies to the controlled burning of heather within the permitted season period.
- Landowners should not burn out with the permitted season and ensure suitable 'Fire Plans' are in place during land management operations.
- Communities, tourists and visitors should be aware of the heightened risk of fire at this time of year and people should act safely and responsibly and follow the countryside code.
- Many wildfires are started deliberately or are due to careless, reckless or irresponsible behavior. If you suspect someone of acting suspiciously, recklessly or irresponsibly in the countryside call Scotland Crime stoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111 or call Police Scotland on 101

“Also we would wish to expand on our Home Fire Safety Visit programme and offer advice to all areas of the community. This can be carried out at a convenient time to suit the individual. The Service would also like community members to think about anyone they know who could be at risk from fire It could be a friend, relative, or neighbour and refer this person for a Home Fire Safety Visit where Scottish Fire & Rescue will fit smoke detectors free of charge if required.

“To book a free Home Fire Safety Visit for you, or for someone you know: CALL 0800 0731 999 or visit www.firescotland.gov.uk”

Paul McGuile, Delivery Team Leader of APHA Scotland Field Services, said: “We see this partnership as an excellent tool towards our mission of safeguarding animal and plant health for the benefit of people, the environment and the economy here in the North East of Scotland.”

Edwin Third Operations Manager, Dee and Don District Salmon Fishery Boards, said: "The Dee and Don District Salmon Fishery Boards are the statutory bodies tasked with protecting and enhancing these north east rivers and their stocks of wild salmon and sea trout. The Dee and Don support internationally renowned fisheries which create over 500 full time jobs and bring in millions of pounds of revenue to the rural economy. The Dee and Don District Salmon Fishery Boards are keen to work with others on the North East Scotland Rural Crime & Safety Partnership not only to help protect Scotland’s iconic fish species but also to help reduce rural crime in general and keep our rural communities safe."