

Rural Crime Survey – Final Results

Background

On 15th March 2023 the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner launched an online survey aimed at Cleveland's rural communities. The focus of the survey was on better understanding community safety concerns in rural areas and how the police and community safety partners could improve the service they deliver to rural communities. The survey ran for six weeks until 26th April 2023. To allow comparison of data the question set used was the same as the previous OPCC Rural Crime Survey which was undertaken in Spring 2021 with one additional question around confidence in local policing.

Demographics

Despite extensive promotion by the OPCC and Cleveland Police through press releases, social media and circulation via the Tees Rural Crime Forum only 75 responses were received to the survey. This compares with 123 respondents in the previous survey. The majority of respondents (86.5%) were rural community residents, with landowners and business owners making up the rest of the respondents.

Over two thirds of the respondents (68%) were from the Redcar & Cleveland area, followed by Stockton and Hartlepool (both 14.7%) and Middlesbrough (2.7%).

Key Concerns

The top five community safety concerns raised by respondents were:

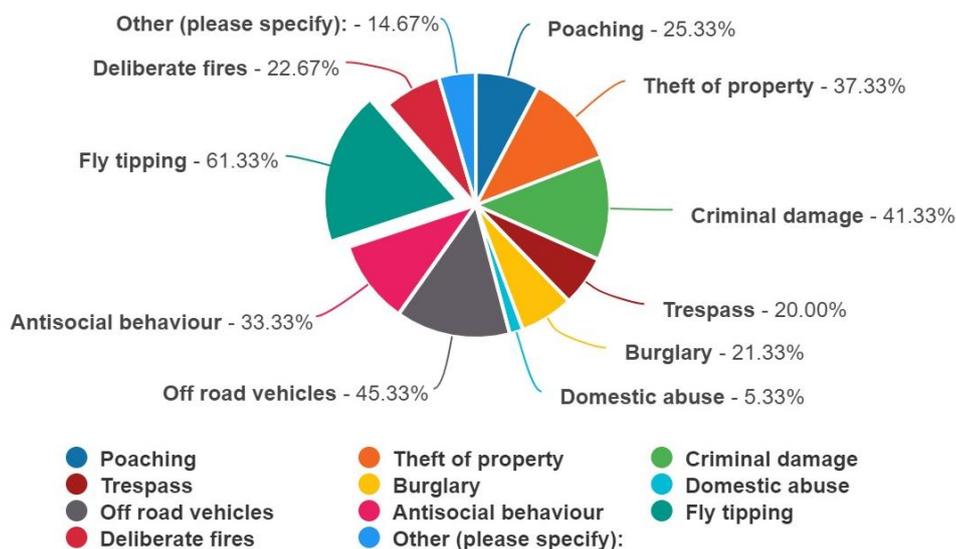
- Fly tipping (61.3%)
- Off road vehicles (45.3%)
- Criminal damage (41.3%)
- Theft of property (37.3%)
- Antisocial behaviour (33.3%)

These top five concerns remain broadly similar to the 2021 survey although criminal damage was a greater concern in this survey than previously and poaching was less of a concern than in 2021.

Speeding, inconsiderate and illegal parking and drugs were the main concerns mentioned in the Other section of this question. Other issues raised were illegal hunting with dogs and issues with trespassers leaving gates open leading to livestock escaping.

The chart below shows the full range of responses received:

What are your key community safety concerns at the current time? Please select up to three of the choices below



Confidence in Policing

Respondents were asked to rate their confidence in Cleveland Police from 1 to 10 with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest.

If we consider 1 to 4 as being low confidence, 5 and 6 as being neutral and 7 to 10 as being high confidence 38.9% had low confidence levels compared to 33.3% who had high confidence levels. The full range of responses is shown below:

Confidence Rating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Responses	11.1%	5.56%	12.5%	9.72%	26.39%	6.94%	8.33%	6.94%	8.33%	4.17%
	8	4	9	7	19	5	6	5	6	3

Service Improvement

Respondents were asked how they felt that the police and community safety partners could improve the way they served the rural community. This was a free text question to allow a full range of responses.

By far the most frequent response was an increased visible police presence in rural areas. More engagement with rural communities was also frequently mentioned, together with making this engagement accessible to working people by holding community meetings with the police on evenings rather than through the day.

A quicker response when issues were reported was mentioned by many respondents, together with more robust enforcement activity and increased penalties for offending.

Several respondents felt that police lacked awareness of the impact of rural crime on communities and that rural crimes were taken less seriously than crimes taking place in urban areas.

Some proactive suggestions for targeted activity included:

- Communications campaign raising awareness in the general community of the impact of rural crime
- Increased CCTV in rural areas
- Making Council tips more accessible to prevent fly tipping – this could also include days when skips were provided in central community areas for people to bring out their large refuse items
- Make businesses responsible for rubbish that is being used for fire setting where it is clear they have not disposed/ stored rubbish correctly creating opportunities for fire setting

Respondents were next asked what they would want from the police and community safety partners in an ideal world. Again this was a free text question to allow a full range of responses.

The responses were very much the same as the previous question, namely:

- More visible presence
- More robust enforcement
- Tougher penalties for offending
- Quicker response when reporting incidents
- Increased engagement with rural communities

Again respondents felt that there was a general lack of awareness of the impact of rural crime on local communities with services being too urban focused. One respondent made reference to the fact that the Council refers to 'the town' rather than 'the borough' which would incorporate both rural and urban areas. Services should acknowledge that the needs of rural communities differ to the needs of urban communities but that services should be able to support both.

Respondents suggested there should be a greater focus on preventative activity, including increased information sharing between Cleveland Police and partners and also between Cleveland Police and neighbouring forces.

The use of mobile CCTV in fly tipping hotspots was suggested together with proactive off road police patrols to target misuse of off road vehicles in rural areas.

The final question allowed any final free text comments.

In this section there was recognition of the difference that the dedicated Rural Crime Coordinator post has made to Cleveland Police response to rural crime, both in terms of staff awareness of rural issues and also of appropriate responses to reported rural crime.

Use of What3words to pinpoint rural locations was seen as a positive step and it was hoped that this system could be accessed across front line resources.

There was however also recognition of the insufficient funding and resources to effectively tackle the issues and the damage to public confidence due to reputational issues within the Force.