

Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson Ceartais
Cabinet Secretary for Justice

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Christine Grahame MSP
Convener of the Justice Committee
c/o: Justice Committee Clerks
Room T2.60
The Scottish Parliament
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22nd April 2015

Dear Christine,

Thank you for your letters of March 4 2015 to myself and the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment about the Justice Committee's round-table evidence session on agricultural crime.

I would like to reassure you that local policing – shaped and delivered in communities, both rural and urban – remains at the heart of Scottish policing. This is complemented whenever and wherever needed by specialist expertise and equipment for complex or time-consuming issues.

Local policing and local accountability are fundamental to policing in Scotland. Each of the 14 Police Scotland Divisions has a Local Commander who works with councils, communities and local partners to shape and deliver local policing through 353 ward level policing plans, covering every local community in Scotland.

There is also a Local Policing Plan in place for each of Scotland's 32 local authority areas which sets out the agreed local policing priorities for the area. Each local authority has a committee which scrutinises local policing and receives regular reports from local commanders.

Police Scotland treats all crimes seriously, regardless of where they occur and which sector of society they affect. As you know, recorded crime is at its lowest level in 40 years. That is to be welcomed and it is testament to the commitment of the police and other justice partners who are working hard to address offending and its underlying causes, wherever that crime occurs.



Agricultural crime can pose particular challenges given the rural locations and occasional delays in identifying when the crime has actually occurred. Police Scotland review all reported crimes and this captures and ensures that all reported crimes are investigated to a high standard, with the complainers being consulted from a very early stage in the investigation and provided with updates throughout.


The eight legacy police forces had individual Farm Watch programmes with varying degrees of prevention tactics. In Police Scotland, a working group has been established to co-ordinate the different Farm Watch area practices and standardise their approach to achieve a single Farm Watch process. Chief Superintendent Gavin Robertson has been identified as the Strategic Liaison contact for the NFU Scotland and attends quarterly meetings to allow members to highlight any issues in their local farming community. In addition, a network of divisional police contacts has been put in place to liaise with NFU Scotland area managers. Scottish Government agriculture officials are also in regular contact with NFU Scotland and may be able to help any future initiatives.

Farm Watch membership provides local farmers with a preventative kit which includes display notices, a Smartwater kit to covertly mark farming equipment and a security survey.

A text alert scheme piloted in the Highlands and Islands is currently being rolled out throughout Scotland and has proved successful in detecting any signs of criminality on farm land. The success of this and Farm Watch has resulted in a real reduction in opportunistic crime.

Finally, as you may be aware, the Solicitor General has ordered a review of prosecution policy in this area to focus on this type of criminality. The review will ensure full consideration is given to the impact of these crimes and, where appropriate, this information is passed to the court for consideration in the event of a conviction.

I hope this is information helpful,

Best wishes


MICHAEL MATHESON