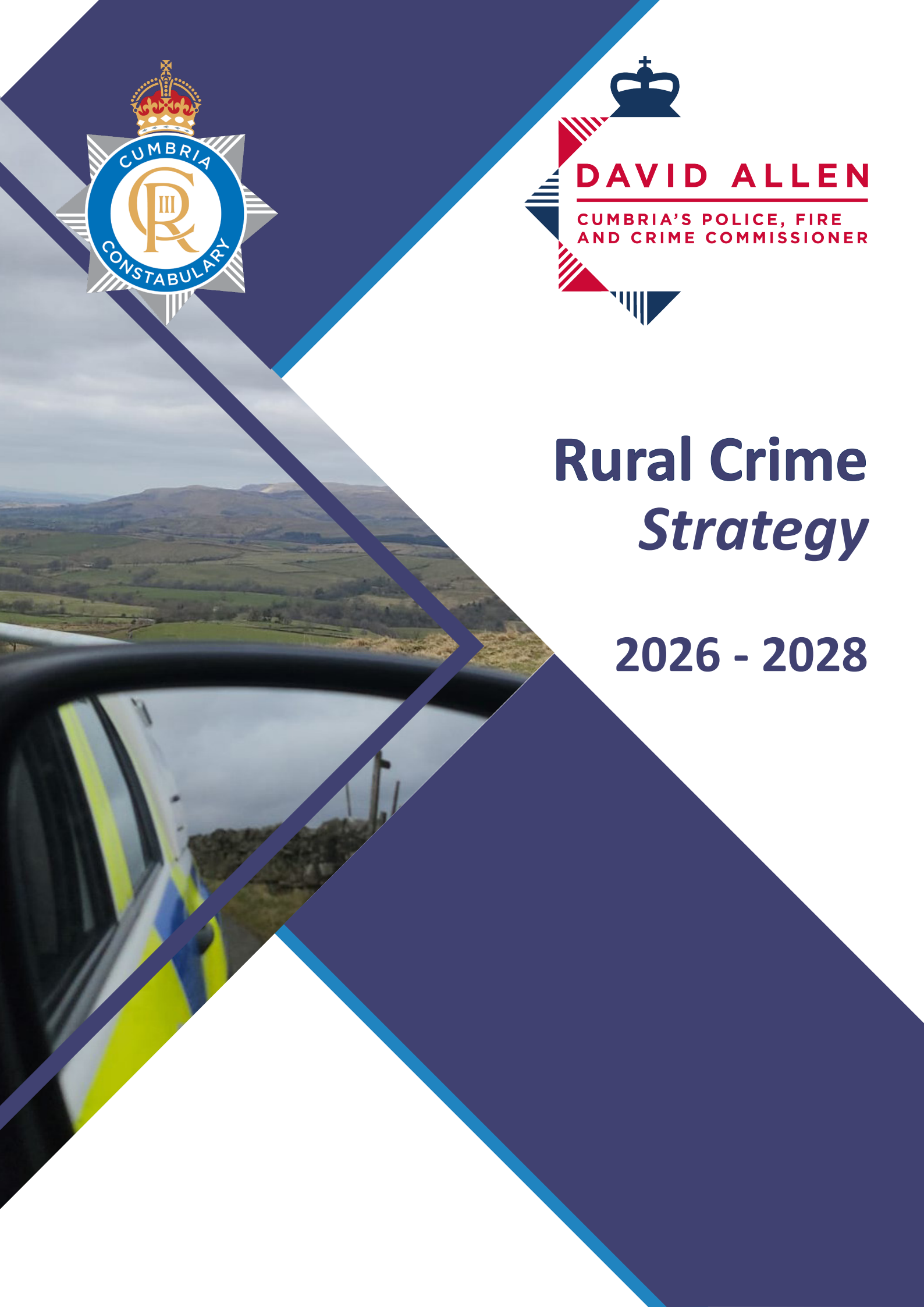




Rural Crime *Strategy*

2026 - 2028



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Foreword – Chief Constable



Chief Constable Darren Martland

Rural crime in Cumbria is more than a matter of stolen property, it strikes at the heart of our communities, livelihoods, and way of life. The theft of farm machinery, livestock, and vehicles brings heavy financial losses, while wildlife offences, fly tipping, and heritage crime damage our environment and cultural heritage. For many, the consequences are not only economic but deeply personal, eroding confidence, increasing isolation, and affecting mental wellbeing

Cumbria’s unique geography, vast landscapes, remote farms, and dispersed populations creates both opportunity and vulnerability. Organised criminal groups exploit this isolation, targeting communities that often feel exposed. The true scale of rural crime is likely greater than official statistics suggest, as many incidents go unreported.

Yet the resilience of our communities remains strong. Initiatives such as Operation Checkpoint demonstrate the power of collaboration between police forces, volunteers, and residents to disrupt criminal networks and reassure the public. By combining intelligence, vigilance, and practical security measures, we can reduce risk and strengthen trust.

This strategy sets out our commitment to tackling rural crime in Cumbria. It recognises the economic, social, and emotional impacts felt by those who live and work in the countryside, and it outlines how we will work together to protect livelihoods, safeguard heritage, and ensure that rural communities remain safe, vibrant, and confident in the future.

Foreword – Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner

Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner David Allen

Cumbria's rural communities mean a great deal to me, not just professionally, but personally too. Through my family I have strong ties to farming, with my in-laws being farmers themselves, so I understand first-hand the realities of rural life. The early starts, the long days, the pride people take in their work, and the worry when crime threatens livelihoods that are already under pressure.

I also started my own career in policing as a village bobby in Burgh by Sands. It was my first posting, and it's an experience I still cherish. Policing a rural community taught me the value of trust, visibility and really knowing the people you serve. You quickly learn that in the countryside, crime doesn't just affect property, it affects families, businesses and whole communities. Those lessons have stayed with me throughout my career and continue to shape how I approach my role as Commissioner today.



When developing this strategy, it was important to me that it was shaped by the people who know rural Cumbria best. We have listened directly to residents living and working in our countryside and worked closely with key partners such as the National Farmers' Union. Their insight and experience have helped us better understand the real issues facing rural communities, from isolation and under-reporting to the growing impact of organised criminal activity. This strategy reflects what we have been told matters most, including visible policing, stronger prevention and a response that genuinely understands rural life.

When I consulted on my Police, Fire and Crime Plan, people across Cumbria were clear that rural crime is one of their biggest concerns. That didn't surprise me. Too often rural crime is hidden and unreported even though its impact can be devastating. Whether it is machinery theft, livestock crime, wildlife offences or organised gangs targeting isolated areas, the harm caused is very real.

This Rural Crime Strategy sets out how, working closely with Cumbria Constabulary and our partners, we will take that challenge head on. It is about prevention, strong enforcement, good intelligence and, just as importantly, listening to the people who live and work in our rural communities. My commitment is simple, to make sure rural Cumbria is not seen as an easy target, and that those who live and work here feel supported, protected and confident in their police force.

I am proud of Cumbria's countryside and the people who keep it going. This strategy is about standing alongside them and doing everything we can to keep our rural communities safe now and for the future.



Executive Summary

Rural Crime impacts on the people of Cumbria, this strategy documents how Cumbria Constabulary supported by the Office of the Police Fire & Crime Commissioner , intends to deal with rural crime.

Rural crime is everyone's business within Cumbria Constabulary as protecting our communities is a key priority.

This strategy supports the Police, Fire & Crime Plan set out by Cumbria's Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, David Allen.

An overview of our Rural Communities

Cumbria is the most north western county in England, sharing a border with Scotland and made up of two unitary authorities: Cumberland, and Westmorland & Furness. According to the Office for National Statistics, the county's mid 2020 population was estimated at 499,781. Compared with the national average, Cumbria has a lower proportion of younger residents and a higher proportion of older residents.

Covering 2,614 square miles, Cumbria is geographically the second largest county in England and one of the most sparsely populated. It contains one city – Carlisle, and six major towns, alongside some of the country's most iconic landscapes. The county is home to the Lake District National Park and part of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, both central to its cultural identity and visitor economy.

Agriculture, fisheries, and forestry form the largest share of local enterprise, accounting for around 20% of all businesses. Farming remains at the heart of Cumbria's rural economy, directly employing more than 12,000 people and supporting a wide range of industries.

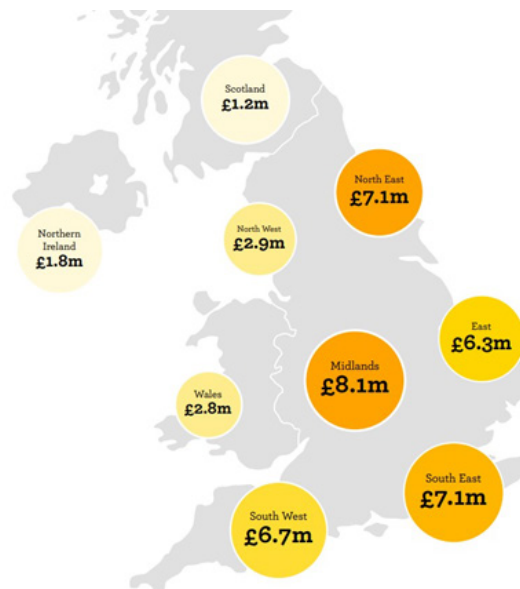
Agriculture plays a central role in Cumbria, shaping the local economy while also helping to care for the rural environment. The county attracts around 45 million visitors each year, with farming and the countryside contributing significantly to Cumbria's social, cultural, and economic wellbeing.

The National Perspective

COUNTING THE COST OF RURAL CRIME

Region or Country	2024 cost	2023 cost	% change from 2023
East	£6.3m	£7.1m	-11%
Midlands	£8.1m	£11.7m	-31%
North East	£7.1m	£8.6m	-17%
North West	£2.9m	£3.2m	-11%
Northern Ireland	£1.8m	£2m	-9%
Scotland	£1.2m	£1.8m	-33%
South East	£7.1m	£8.9m	-20%
South West	£6.7m	£7m	-4%
Wales	£2.8m	£2.4m	+18%
UK	£44.1m	£52.8m	-16.5%

Estimated costs based on NFU Mutual claims statistics, rounded to the nearest £100,000. Percentage changes are based on exact figures.



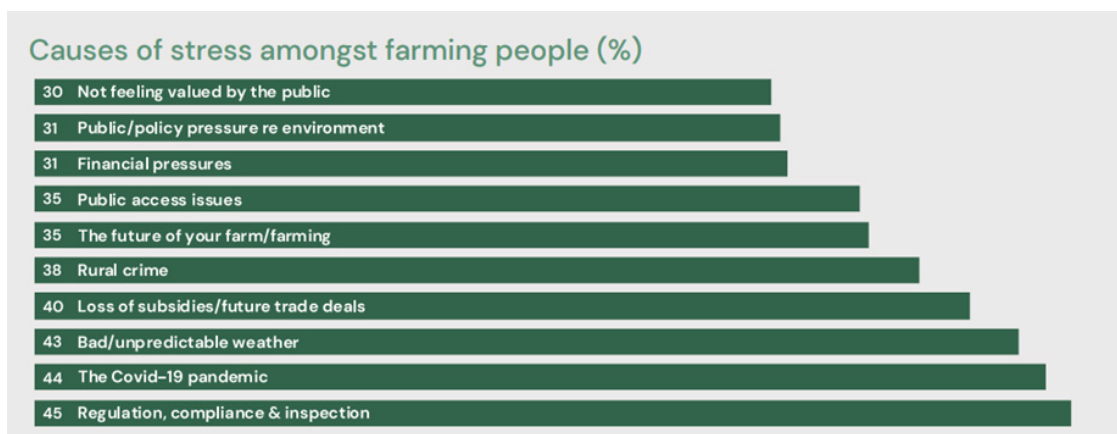
*NFU Rural Crime Report 2025

The National Farmers' Union (NFU) Rural Crime Report 2025 provides an overview of the impact rural crime continues to have on farming communities and rural businesses. Criminal activity can place financial pressure on businesses, disrupt day to day operations, and cause understandable concern for those living and working in the countryside.

In 2024, the total cost of rural crime across the UK was estimated at £44.1 million. In Cumbria, reported losses amounted to £766,000, down from £808,000 in 2023, representing a reduction of 5.2%.

These figures are drawn from NFU Mutual insurance claims and may not fully reflect the wider effects of rural crime, including the disruption experienced by farming operations and the broader social and economic impacts on rural areas.

Alongside financial losses, the report also evidences the personal impact of rural crime, with many farmers nationally reporting that it has affected their wellbeing and peace of mind. Overall, the findings reinforce the need for sustained focus, investment and collaborative action to protect rural communities.



*Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI) "Big Survey

National Police Chief's Rural & Wildlife Crime Strategy 2025-2028

National Priorities are set out in the National Police Chief's Council (NFCC) Rural and Wildlife Crime Strategy 2025-2028.

The Strategy sets out nine strategic priorities that represent the greatest areas of threat, risk and harm to rural communities and wildlife from a policing perspective.

While the national priorities continue to mirror those set out in the previous strategy, they now include an important new focus: Organised Rural Acquisitive Crime and Machinery Theft.

Rural Crime



The Strategy recognises that acquisitive crime enabled by organised crime groups (OCGs) often involves the theft of essential agricultural assets, including machinery, GPS systems, farm equipment, quad bikes, and all terrain vehicles. These offences cause significant harm to rural farming communities, resulting in operational delays, disruptions to working practices, increased feelings of isolation, and substantial financial consequences.

The Strategy also acknowledges that the term rural crime is interpreted differently by differing groups and individuals. It is therefore not intended to set the strategic direction of policing within rural areas, but rather to provide clear direction on specific crime types that commonly occur within rural settings.

Cumbria Rural Crime Priorities

There is currently no formal Home Office definition of “rural crime,” and national crime recording practices do not recognise it as a distinct crime category. Therefore, to ensure consistency and clarity in our local approach, Cumbria Constabulary has adopted the following definition:

“Any acquisitive crime or related offences which occur in rural areas.”

In 2025, rural crime in Cumbria accounted for 35.7% of all recorded crime.

Volume of all crime (2025)	Volume of rural crime (2025)	% of crime that is rural (2025)
36,168	12,895	35.7%

The trend in rural crime is showing an increase when comparing data from 2025 with 2020 (12,895 vs 11,770: 9.6%).

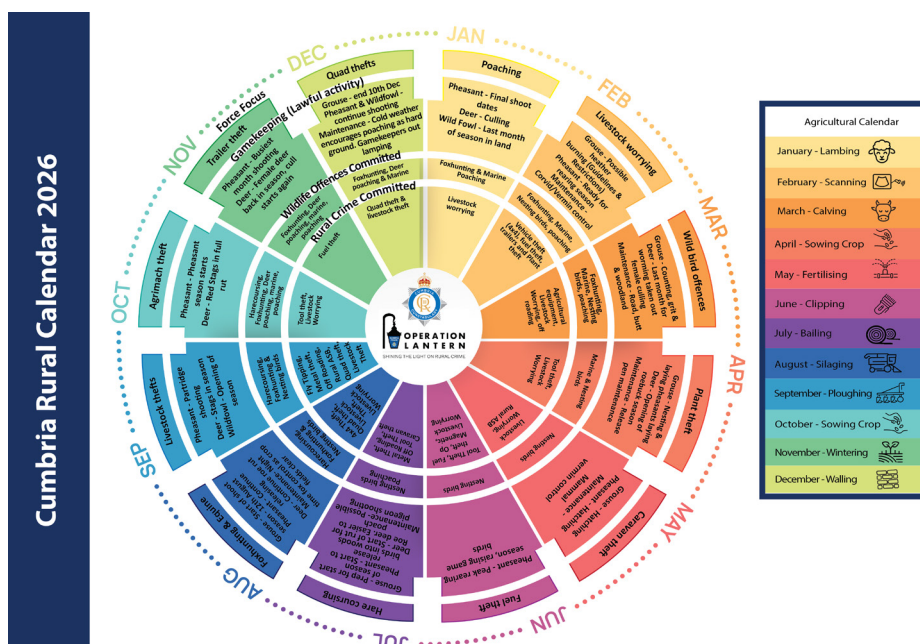
The rural crime priorities identified for Cumbria are:

- Organised Rural Acquisitive Crime
- Livestock (Worrying /Theft)
- Wildlife/Poaching
- Illegal Hunting

All of these priorities are influenced by the activities of organised criminal groups and travelling acquisitive offenders. Cumbria Constabulary recognises the importance of targeting, disrupting, and deterring these individuals, with the clear aim of making Cumbria a highly hostile environment for criminal activity of this nature. Looking ahead, a detailed understanding of these groups will continue to inform and strengthen our approach to tackling rural crime, ensuring that our policing response remains robust, intelligence led, and capable of meeting emerging challenges.

Domestic abuse in rural communities presents unique challenges, particularly where isolation and limited access to services can leave individuals vulnerable to ongoing abuse and exploitation. It is recognised nationally that domestic abuse is significantly under reported. We will continue to focus on identifying these challenges, improving awareness, and ensuring victims receive the support they need.

The activity in relation to Rural Crime is mapped annually and shared across the Constabulary.



Rural Crime Strategic Objectives

OBJECTIVE 1: Provide an outstanding policing service to the Rural Communities of Cumbria

WE WILL:

- The Rural Crime Team will participate in a minimum of 30 community engagement events each year across rural communities, strengthening understanding of local concerns and emerging risks.
- The Rural Crime Team will run a minimum of 12 Cross Departmental intelligence led operations per year targeting organised criminal activity affecting rural communities.
- To support a professional response to reports of illegal hunting, Relevant Response & NPT Officers to receive specific training on this subject.
- Deliver crime prevention advice to rural homes / businesses each year to help reduce vulnerability and prevent rural crime.

OBJECTIVE 2: Make Cumbria a hostile environment for travelling acquisitive criminals

WE WILL:

- Work with neighbouring forces, partners, and external agencies to ensure information and intelligence relating to cross border rural crime trends and criminal activity is consistently shared and acted upon by Cumbria Police.
- Work alongside local and specialist policing teams to relentlessly pursue opportunities to disrupt and prosecute rural crime offenders.
- Reduce the number of Quad Thefts in the County of Cumbria (April 2026 to March 2027)

OBJECTIVE 3: Build effective partnerships to respond to the needs of Rural Communities

WE WILL:

- Host a rural crime conference in 2026, bringing together partners, communities and specialists to share insight, drive innovation and best practice.
- Increase awareness and understanding of the rural crime issues affecting Cumbria by working closely with our relevant partners to deliver a coordinated, informed and effective response for rural communities.
- Ensure skills and experiences of volunteers are utilised to support the work of the Constabulary.
- The Rural Crime Team will remain an active participant in OP. Hawkeye (NE) and the NW Regional Rural Crime Group. Learning & best practice from participation will help improve how we tackle Rural Crime in Cumbria.

OBJECTIVE 4: Increase the confidence of Rural Communities in Cumbria Constabulary

WE WILL:

- Publish a quarterly Rural Crime Update to highlight activity, outcomes and opportunities for communities to be involved.
- Deliver (at least) quarterly multi agency days of action each year, demonstrating visible enforcement, proactive partnership working and our commitment to keeping rural communities safe.
- Increase membership of Rural Community Groups across Cumbria, helping to reduce isolation and vulnerability in rural communities (currently 1,386 members).
- Work in partnership with Crimestoppers to raise awareness of Rural Crime and encourage greater reporting from the public



Delivering the Strategy

Rural Crime Team

The Constabulary has a dedicated Rural Crime Team. This specialist, highly trained team supports officers county wide in responding to rural offences and provides expert capability in this area. This small, specialist team works closely with our Neighbourhood Policing Teams to prevent and tackle rural crime, while also collaborating with neighbouring forces and partner agencies to coordinate investigations and lead proactive engagement and prevention activity.

Neighbourhood Policing Teams

Cumbria Constabulary's neighbourhood policing is built around highly visible, community based teams who work to reduce crime, tackle anti social behaviour and engage directly with residents across the county.

The Constabulary operates six Neighbourhood Policing Teams (NPTs), covering:

- Carlisle
- Allerdale
- Copeland
- Eden
- Barrow
- South Lakes

Each team includes Police Officers, PCSOs, and Special Constables, all of whom contribute to tackling rural crime, supported by specialist units, including the Rural Crime Team.

In 2025, the Sycamore Gap incident highlighted the effectiveness of our collaborative approach. The Rural Crime Team, in partnership with Northumbria Police and the National Trust, supported the successful prosecution of two offenders from Cumbria.

In another example, illegal hunting activity in the South Lakes led to several arrests. Neighbourhood Policing Teams, supported by Operational Support and the Rural Crime Team, carried out coordinated operations across both Cumbria and North Wales to bring the offenders to justice.

Operation Lantern

The Rural Crime Team work under Operation Lantern, the Constabulary's overarching initiative to address rural crime across Cumbria. This dedicated operation aims to prevent and disrupt serious and organised rural acquisitive crime that impacts on our county.

Operation August

The Constabulary delivers a response to hunting related rural crime through Operation August a dedicated initiative focused on monitoring and preventing hunting with hounds. Fox hunting is recognised as both a national and force wildlife crime priority, and Operation August is the operational response to reports of suspected fox hunting, in violation of The Hunting Act 2004.

Operation Checkpoint

In addition, the Constabulary participates in Operation Checkpoint—the largest rural crime initiative of its kind in the UK. Operation Checkpoint brings together several police forces across the North of England to work collaboratively to prevent and tackle rural acquisitive crime, wildlife offences, and poaching.

Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee

The Constabulary are actively working toward the Government's Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee.

One element of this will see an investment in Community Beat Officer Roles, local identifiable and contactable individuals responsible for Neighbourhood Policing in specific areas.

This investment, which equates to an increase of 44% in officers ensures that Neighbourhood Policing Teams, supported by the central Rural Crime Team, remain fully committed and capable in tackling rural crime.

Community Fund

To help deliver the Rural Crime Strategy and support local efforts to prevent crime, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner provides funding to help rural areas stay safe. This funding recognises that local groups and communities play an important role in tackling rural crime, and it aims to give them the support they need to take action that reduces risk and strengthens community safety.

The Community Fund offers grants of £2,500 to local organisations and community groups. The fund is designed to enable projects and initiatives that help reduce or deter crime and antisocial behaviour across communities in Cumbria. Rural communities are encouraged to apply for this valuable funding, which can make a meaningful difference to local safety, resilience, and crime prevention efforts.

A link to further information and details on how to apply is provided on the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's website: <https://cumbria-pfcc.gov.uk/what-we-do/funding/community-fund>

Measuring our Progress

A suite of performance measures have been established to monitor progress, assess effectiveness, and identify areas where improvements are being made.

The Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable will continue to monitor the impact of the strategy through internal governance arrangements such as Executive Board Police and externally through the Commissioner's Public Accountability Meetings, which members of the public may attend to observe how the Constabulary is performing.

