

Executive Summary

High value thefts from rural farms has steadily risen within the Scottish Borders, having a negative effect on local farmers, their ability to farm and the health and wellbeing of rural communities.

Analysis of the types and location of rural crime identified that there was no specific hot spot for crime and that the types of crimes were also none specific. This made the detection and prevention of crime difficult. When crimes were looked at in detail it was evident that most cases were easily preventable. Doors were insecure, keys were often accessible and high value equipment and items were easily accessed.

To tackle this issue, Scottish Borders Council and a number of public and third sector organisations came together to set up a project that would deliver an escalating programme of prevention within the farming community. The intention was to promote easily fixable solutions which would prevent access to high value items. The aim of the project was to get farmers to take ownership of their safety and crime prevention. To achieve this, a variety of methods were employed, including the publication of a booklet, letters to residents, community events and a multi-media campaign.

The project recognised that rural communities were often difficult to contact and formulated a project that would deliver the message to all farmers with local 'hands on' advice through visits and events, backed up by letters and booklets. In addition to engaging with farmers the project used overt signpost location on all routes to make travelling criminals aware that they are being targeted.

Post project analysis of incident data identified a significant reduction in the numbers of rural crimes and community surveys identified a reduction in those that felt afraid of crime.

This project won the Innovative Media Safer Communities Award 2016

Background and Aims

Between 2012 and 2015 there was a dramatic increase (138%) in the volume and value of rural thefts. The impact of rural crime on communities and their economy resulted in Scottish Border Council and Police Scotland establishing a project to reduce incidents of rural crime by raising awareness of security and crime prevention and empowering farmers to be responsible for their own property.

Activities

The team identified a need to work in partnership with a range of public, private and third sector organisations, to ensure that the messages were disseminated widely and in the right places to reach the target audience.

It was decided that the project would deliver a range of activities that had a sense of escalation – information for all, open events for smaller numbers and then targeted prevention visits and property marking.

To deliver the prevention message the project team designed and distributed a prevention booklet to all Scottish Border farms, used social media and engaged with local press and radio to extend the coverage.

The National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS) helped to identify local contacts and were able to host and publicise Walk and Talk events. Their involvement was pivotal in providing access to farmers and encouraging engagement by farmers. Partners worked with Scottish Government, attending committees to showcase the project plan and gain support. This led to two MSPs attending a publicity event which raised the profile of the project and secured wider press coverage.

The project applied and received funding for property marking packs, which were distributed via visits to 200 local farms. During the visits officers provided guidance on the use of the DNA based property marking and delivered additional customised crime prevention and safety advice.

To deter crime the project used overt signage with a focus on our main travel routes, to keep the message in the minds of local people whilst sending out a strong message to travelling criminals.

Impact

The main purpose of this project was to reduce the cost of thefts, and the additional financial impact, to the farmers.

The value of theft fell from £347,282 (2014/15) to £131,383 (2015/16), a significant 62% reduction. Additional savings based on the reduced impact of a theft have yet to be costed.

In addition there was a significant reduction in the number of police incidents from a peak of 121 rural theft incidents in 2013/14, falling to 51 (2015/16), another significant reduction of 58%.

The most recent household survey by Scottish Borders Council suggested that people are now less concerned about thefts. When asked what type of priority housebreakings and thefts should be, 65% (in 2013) of people said high, this has fallen to 57% (in 2015).

Apathetic and deflated victims of crime have become more optimistic individuals and embraced the crime prevention measures. By giving farmers the information, skills and means to protect their own farms, as well as the use of overt signage to deter travelling criminals, the risk of crime was reduced.

Lessons Learnt and Sustainability

Farmers are hard to reach with lambing and harvest seasons, in particular, making their time scarce. Having the National Farmers Union of Scotland as a project partner was pivotal to developing timely engagement with the farming community. The project identified that bland, generic messages have very limited appeal. Where they were able to highlight a crime or near miss, and accompany it with a prevention message, the interest was much greater. On social media this led to many more shares and views than an unspecific message, and has grown momentum with members of the farming community highlighting suspicious activity. On two separate occasions this led to the direct recovery of stolen quad bikes.

Resources

The total project costs were estimated at £14,500

- £1500 was directly funded by Scottish Borders Council Safer Communities
- £2500 by Police Scotland
- £5500 from the supplier of the rural property marking packs, through a significant negotiated discount based on the order size
- £4900 “in-kind” support came from Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in terms of personnel to carry out visits to farms, from Scottish Borders Council for printing and from the National Farmers Union Scotland who helped host and publicise events

Practice Note Information

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