



Chief Constable fortnightly update to the Police and Crime Commissioner - 12 April 2024.

Dear Police and Crime Commissioner, Philip Wilkinson,

I would like to start this letter today reflecting on the wonderful event I attended alongside you to welcome the new High Sheriff, a position that dates back to Saxon times, to their role last Friday in Salisbury. Dr Olivia Chapple made her declaration and acceptance at St John the Baptist Church, Bishopstone, taking over from Mr Pradeep Bhardwaj whom it has been an absolute pleasure to have worked alongside over the last year.

I was deeply honoured to be part of the ceremonial procession alongside yourself Commissioner, and other partners and colleagues from across the county. I very much look forward to continuing our excellent relationship with the new High Sheriff over the coming year.

Before stepping down from his year of service as High Sheriff, I was delighted to welcome Mr Bhardwaj to Force Headquarters in Devizes, where he presented a High Sheriff's Award to the teams within the Force who are involved in road safety. This was in recognition not only for their contribution towards keeping Wiltshire roads safer through the prevention and enforcement work they have done over the last year, but also in recognition that these teams deal with some of the most incredibly difficult and distressing incidents such as tragic road casualties and fatalities. One road traffic collision is one too many and roads related incidents can have devastating impacts on individuals and on families.

On average last year, these teams dealt with around 686 speeding drivers every month, with 38 per cent of serious and fatal collisions attended in 2023 resulting in either a charge or with a case being built as a potential prosecution case. In the last year, we have seen an incredible 25 per cent reduction in serious and fatal collisions in Wiltshire. I would like to use this letter as an opportunity to publicly congratulate all of the teams involved in this work for the excellent job that they do on behalf of the public of Wiltshire and Swindon - thank you. I know that this award meant a lot to each and every one of them. More information about this wonderful event can be found here: [Road units honoured by High Sheriff | Wiltshire Police](#)

In my letter to you, dated 15 March, I wrote about Operation Scorpion - the regional commitment between yourself and your PCC counterparts, and all five Chief Constables across the South West, to carry out activity to make the region a hostile environment for drug supply. We saw excellent operational results in our county around drugs disruption and enforcement activity. However, I would like to take the opportunity today to focus on a further area that troubles me. Exploitation of vulnerable people in our society is a real and growing issue of concern and I need the help of our communities. People who are vulnerable in our neighbourhoods are far more likely to be subject to exploitation from people seeking to cause harm through the illegal supply and distribution of drugs, and other criminality.

In addition, drug dealers and organised crime groups have various ways of establishing their presence in our towns and cities, and one of these is by exploiting vulnerable people and using their home as a base for dealing drugs - a process known as 'cuckooing'. Dealers often convince the vulnerable person to let their home be used for drug dealing by giving them free drugs or offering to pay for food or utilities. They often target people who are lonely, isolated, or have addiction issues. It's common for properties to be used for a short amount of time, moving address frequently to reduce the chance of being caught.

We can all play a part in looking out for and reporting signs of county lines or cuckooing activity in our neighbourhoods, and some of the signs to spot include:

- An increase in visitors and cars to a house or flat or new faces appearing
- Frequent visitors at unsociable hours
- Changes in your neighbour's daily routine
- A vulnerable person declining visits from friends, family or care givers
- Unusual smells coming from a property
- A change of a resident's mood/demeanour (e.g. secretive/withdrawn/ aggressive/emotional)
- Changes in the way people you might know dress, and unexplained sometimes unaffordable, new clothes, jewellery, phones, cars etc
- Residents or young people going missing, maybe for long periods of time
- Young people seeming unfamiliar with your community or where they are
- Possession of hotel keys or keys to unknown places.

To ensure we, as the police, do all we can to safeguard individuals, community intelligence is absolutely vital to us so that we can tackle these issues and make people's homes, and our streets safer. I appeal to our communities to contact us if they have any concerns within their neighbourhoods, either through contacting [CrimeStoppers anonymously](#) or [by reporting through the Wiltshire Police website](#).

I would also like to spend some time in this letter to you this week talking about the really important issue of Rural Crime. Rural Crime is a wide-ranging and emotive subject that can cause significant criminal, emotional and financial harm to our rural communities. Over the past two weeks the Rural Crime team and Neighbourhood Policing Teams have been engaged with the national livestock worrying campaign named Operation Recall.

Operation Recall asks dog owners to keep dogs under control around livestock, as I am sad to say that this has been an increasing problem across the county over recent

months. In Wiltshire, we have an average of two reports of livestock worrying cases each month and believe that many, many more go unreported. The campaign started on 27 March to educate and inform dog owners around the law and very serious implications of not keeping their dogs under control. A 2023 survey by the NFU Mutual with 1,100 dog owners showed that 66% allow their pets to roam freely off-lead in the countryside, yet 39% admit their dogs do not come back to them when called, and 64% admit their pets chase livestock.

The same survey puts the south-west region as having the second highest cost to livestock owners in England, with cases rising nationally. This is really shocking. Let me be absolutely clear – my officers and staff will be robust and relentless in targeting crime affecting our farming and rural communities and will take all action possible in tackling the criminal activity.

A further issue impacting our rural communities is hare coursing and, during the period that Operation Recall has been effective, there have been four reports of hare coursing; a crime that can cause thousands of pounds of damage to farmers in a matter of minutes. In addition, theft and burglary continue to be the most common type of crime committed within our rural communities and, over the past 12 months to end March 2024, this has accounted for 69 per cent of recordable rural crimes – with tools, GPS systems and trailers the most common items stolen. I am very pleased to say that the past month has seen the successful prosecution of one gang who stole several vehicle batteries from a farm building, and the CCTV evidence provided by the farmer no doubt helped secure that prosecution.

In terms of burglary more widely, over recent months we have seen a number of successes in arrests and convictions of those who choose to commit this heinous crime. Our dedicated burglary team are being relentless in their activity to target prolific burglars, and we attended over 97 per cent of residential burglaries in February alone. In addition, we have nearly tripled the further action rate for burglaries in the past 12 months, meaning more people are being brought to justice for committing burglary in our county. I hope these results give the public reassurance that we are absolutely focused on operational prevention and enforcement activity to keep people's homes and buildings safe.

In closing, on Monday I will be holding my second Facebook Live event, where I invite members of the public to join me online, ask me any questions they may have, or share their observations of policing in the county. I really enjoy these events, and the opportunity to engage directly with the public is absolutely one of the best parts of my role as Chief Constable of this wonderful county. The public can join me on the [Wiltshire Police Facebook](#) at 6.30pm on Monday (15 April).

Kindest regards,

Catherine Roper

Chief Constable, Wiltshire Police