



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

RESEARCH, DOCUMENT

Wildlife and Rural Crime Coordination Programme: theory of change (summary)

This report presents the Theory of Change for the All-Wales Wildlife and Rural Crime Coordination Programme. The Programme is delivered through a coordinator and stakeholders.

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Background

In 2021, the Welsh Government created the Wildlife and Rural Crime (WRC) Coordinator role as part of the Wildlife and Rural Crime (WRC) Coordination Programme. Due to the positive impact directly attributed to the role during a 12-month trial (Welsh Government, 2023), Ministers extended funding for the role until 2025. In April 2023 the Welsh Government launched the Wales Wildlife and Rural Crime Strategy (Wales WRC Strategy) with key partners and stakeholders, which set out the strategic aim to deliver a coordinated and effective response to WRC tailored to Wales' needs. This Strategy informs the WRC Coordination Programme, which aims to meet the twin goals of tackling wildlife and rural crime and enhancing multi-agency partnerships in Wales.

The WRC Coordination Programme is part of the Welsh Government's (WG) investment in resources to combat wildlife and rural crime, directed at safeguarding rural communities, habitats, wildlife and other animals. Despite the WG commitment, there are still several challenges that need to be addressed. These include fostering trust in law enforcement agencies, acknowledging the specific requirements of rural communities, developing collaborative stakeholder partnerships, and enhancing stakeholder understanding of the importance of combating WRC. In addressing these challenges, the Programme aims to balance the needs and interests of the government, enforcement agencies, statutory agency partners and stakeholders.

Research aims and methodology

The research aimed to create a Theory of Change (ToC) and associated Logic Model (ToC LM) to map the expected inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes of the Programme. The ToC can be used for developing the intervention as well as monitoring and evaluation planning.

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To achieve this aim, the project met four research objectives:

1. Draw on existing documentation relating to the WRC Coordination Programme to understand the context, assumptions, and previous running and performance of the Programme.
2. Determine the key inputs, activities, outputs, and expected outcomes of the WRC Coordination Programme to develop a draft ToC LM.
3. Collaborate with the key stakeholders responsible for delivering the WRC Coordination Programme to develop and discuss the draft ToC LM, identify underlying assumptions and metrics to monitor future performance.
4. Develop a ToC LM and indicators to support monitoring the progress of the programme using the insights gained through data collection.

A qualitative multi-method approach was undertaken, involving document analysis of existing documentation relating to the WRC Coordination Programme and empirical data collection through a semi-structured interview and three focus groups. The qualitative interview was conducted with the WRC Coordinator role holder to identify their understanding of the key Programme aims, developments, challenges, achievements, and future direction. The three focus groups brought together 21 stakeholders, including the WRC Coordinator role holder, enforcement stakeholders, non-enforcement stakeholders, and Welsh Government stakeholders. The focus groups captured data on the stakeholders' expectations and perceptions of the WRC Coordination Programme, the reasoning behind these, and the group processes which inform multiagency work.

Main findings

The main findings are presented as sections of the ToC LM and reflect both the documents and research participants views. To understand the rationale for the WRC Coordination Programme, the 'context' is first summarised. Then, each

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section of the Logic Model - outcomes, outputs, activities and inputs – is addressed. Followed by, a review of the assumptions underpinning the ToC, the risks to achieving the outcomes, and the data sources for monitoring and evaluation.

Context

Evidence related to the context for the Programme were divided into four areas. These were the challenges of defining the remit of the WRC Coordination Programme, barriers to policy delivery and Programme capacity, barriers to people and processes, and barriers to resources and data.

Clarity on the scope and vision of the WRC Coordination Programme was desired by most participants. Evidence indicates the Programme aims to provide an all Wales focused and coordinated response. It primarily supports enforcement agencies and statutory partners in delivering an effective and sustainable response which protects and enhances habitats, wildlife, and rural communities. While the scope of the Programme is shaped by the reach of the WG, participants felt it can also seek to engage a broad range of stakeholders and support broader political and institutional change in prioritising the response to WRC.

Barriers to policy delivery and Programme capacity were recognised by participants, in particular, the issue of non-devolved powers in Wales and organisational cultural differences. Wildlife and rural crime overlaps devolved and non-devolved areas and agencies, which may give rise to conflict and reduce accountability in delivering the WRC Coordination Programme. Furthermore, in considering Programme sustainability, participants raised the need to avoid overstepping (e.g., into non-devolved areas), overstressing (e.g., focus, activities, and goals), and failing to evidence outcomes, and balance competing stakeholder priorities. High wildlife and rural crime officer (WRCO) turnover, limited stakeholder engagement, and the Programme's reliance on the

WRC Coordinator role holder were identified as likely barriers related to people and process. Barriers to resources & data were repeatedly emphasised in the research, both in supporting a more robust response to WRC and to determining Programme success.

Participants recognised the need for financial and personnel support for the coordinator role, funds to support the ambitious programme of activities & outputs, and improved data identification, reliability, access, compatibility, and analysis.

Outcomes

Outcomes refer to the long-term and short-term Programme effects and changes resulting from Programme outputs. Long-term outcomes look beyond the funding period for the WRC Coordinator role and focus on broader social, policy, practice, and environmental impacts.

There was general consensus from the data that the WRC Coordination Programme aims to foster a strong sense of security and improve the wellbeing of rural communities in the long term. This will be achieved by increasing their knowledge and understanding of wildlife and rural crime, alongside enhancing confidence in the police and reducing harm and fear. A sustainable and coordinated Strategy that extends across Wales and aligns with the UK will also support other outcomes like strengthened legal protection, a harmonised enforcement approach and resilient partnerships among diverse stakeholders. Participants also recognised improved data collection and analysis as central to all other outcomes. Moreover, the Programme will enhance protection and improve outcomes for wildlife, other animals, their habitats, and the environment, in line with the ambitions outlined in WG legislation and policy.

Within the current three-year funding period (2022-2025), the short-term outcomes of the WRC Coordination Programme are focused on strategic

direction, people and partnerships, capacity and resources, and data and intelligence. Participants felt the Programme strategic goals are attainable within this short period, alongside, further alignment of the Wales and UK strategies. To accomplish this, they emphasised the need for the Programme to be evidence-based and actively involve stakeholders in its development. Participants also highlighted the importance of a harmonised and coordinated enforcement approach in Wales, with a clear priority given to addressing these issues by senior leaders. In turn, the Programme will effectively support victims of rural crime, prevent WRC and ensure enforcement officers are well-informed and confident in their roles. Both documents and participants emphasised the urgent need for an improved data collection strategy to better understand WRC rates and inform strategic operations.

Outputs

Outputs are the tangible or measurable products and services resulting from the Programme activities, which help determine, in the short-term, if outcomes are being achieved. Four output categories that closely reflect the outcomes categories were identified: strategic implementation, people and partnerships, capacity and resources, and data and intelligence.

The launch of the Strategy alongside clear communication on the Programme focus and outcomes to stakeholders were identified as relevant outputs. Linked to this, was a feedback loop to ensure the programme was informed by stakeholders, and policy and strategic groups in Wales and UK were informed by the Programme and WRC Coordinator. Evidenced and monitored priority areas were required, overseen by Priority Groups (PGs) which met regularly and reflected the diversity of expert stakeholders. Participants also stressed the need for the Strategy to be integrated into the internal policies of criminal justice (CJS) and statutory partners. Likewise, evidence of a cohesive and coherent enforcement response, as well as a coordinated approach amongst statutory and non-statutory stakeholders were key outputs, recognising the need for

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enforcement and stakeholder ownership of the Programme. To achieve this, the provision of appropriate resources and support was identified. These included enhanced training and resource sharing, and prioritisation of wildlife and rural crime among enforcement agencies, robust recruitment and retention of WRC Officers and personnel, and standardised offence data collection, sharing, and monitoring mechanisms. Developing a data collection strategy, through stakeholder and data mapping, would also support the above outcomes.

Activities

Activities are the actions taken and work performed to achieve set outputs and outcomes. The activities identified in the documents and discussed by participants were mapped to the same four output categories. Strategic implementation included effectively coordinating and implementing the Strategy, evidencing PGs, and developing an effective stakeholder feedback loop. People and partnerships, involved supporting the development of a cohesive enforcement response to wildlife and rural crime, coordinating and supporting relevant PGs, facilitating engagement and networking between stakeholders. Other People and Partnership activities included developing and implementing a communication strategy (to promote the Programme and engage stakeholders), and providing expert advice and guidance to government, statutory agencies and key stakeholders.

Capacity and resources would require the Coordinator to develop and facilitate training and mentoring for enforcement officers, and partners working together through expertise and resource sharing. Raising awareness about accessing and sharing data, facilitating robust reporting and recording of WRC, collecting monitoring data and enhancing data with scholarly research were the activities linked to data and intelligence.

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Inputs

Inputs are the financial, human, and material resources identified in documents and by participants as required to achieve the Programme outcomes. The Programme draws upon key strategies, namely the Wales WRC Strategy, NPCC Strategy, and NWCUC Strategic Assessment, as primary inputs. The existing governance structure, with the WRC Coordinator role embedded within Welsh Government and connected to Welsh enforcement officers and PDGs, serves as another vital input. WRC Coordinator role funding until 2025 ensures the longevity of the Programme, although further funding needs were identified to enable WRC Coordinator financial autonomy and administrative support, and to fund activities linked to Strategy objectives (e.g. training). The expert input from various stakeholders was seen as essential (e.g., statutory, third sector and rural communities), as was a highly qualified individual for the WRC Coordinator position, possessing the requisite seniority, expertise, experience, and network. Access to various (scholarly, stakeholder and CJS) data relating to WRC offences and outcomes, and for continuous Programme monitoring will also need to be place to support Programme efficacy.

Assumptions

The ToC is underpinned by the assumptions identified by participants and extracted from documents. These assumptions reflect stakeholder views and may not be compatible with the actual governance structure and powers in place, and require testing as part of the Programme evaluation. The main assumptions identified included a prioritised response to WRC and a coordinated approach amongst enforcement and other stakeholders, with a central point of contact (the WRC Coordinator), would support the detection, prevention and response to wildlife and rural crime.

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Risks

In discussing the desired outcomes, outputs, activities, and inputs, participants stressed numerous risks to achieving these. The sustainability of the WRC Coordination Programme was a core concern and viewed by participants as dependent on the continuation and expansion of support and resources including the WRC coordinator, enforcement provision and stakeholder collaboration. Concerns were raised about the Programme's broad scope and current WRC Coordination workload, which may result in a lack of focus and overreach. Balancing the conflicting needs and priorities of different stakeholders is also a challenge. The risk of not identifying and engaging the 'right' stakeholders was raised. Likewise, the lack of partnership and collaboration within and across the CJS could jeopardise the Programme.

All participants acknowledged the risk of inadequate baseline data and its impact on enforcement response, stakeholder engagement, and Programme monitoring. Furthermore, the need for careful interpretation of existing administrative data was highlighted to avoid any detrimental consequences to the Programme.

Data and monitoring

Participants struggled to identify valid metrics and indicators, and they expressed concern that developing monitoring indicators alongside the ToC may unhelpfully increase the burden on the Programme and Coordinator. One of the core challenges of monitoring the Programme outputs and outcomes was evaluating what was realistically achievable in a three-year period, and the critical need for reliable baseline data upon which to judge future results. There is a need to enhance data availability to support Programme evaluation. The report provides a table that suggests possible indicators and data, and proposes further data collection opportunities which may facilitate the future monitoring of

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the Programme.

Recommendations

The WRC Coordination Programme ToC serves as a framework for understanding how the Programme operates, the expected inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes, and thereby, the impact it will have on addressing wildlife and rural crime.

Based on the research findings, the researchers made recommendations to the WG WRC Coordination Programme implementation team, including:

- a periodical review of the ToC with a WRC Coordination Programme evaluation
- clarify the scope and vision of the Programme and communicate this clearly to stakeholders as part of the developed communication strategy
- focus on stakeholders' inclusion to build the Programme, as well as collaboration across the CJS to support the development of a WRC response across all agencies
- identify opportunities and support the standardisation of an enforcement response across the four Welsh forces
- allocate funding for resources supporting the WRC Coordinator role and Programme activities and outputs for the duration of the short-term outcomes, and plan for long-term Programme funding needs
- use the Programme to drive the initiative to make all WRCs recordable and notifiable offences, with discrete crime codes to aid data granularity and analysis
- design and develop a research and evaluation plan, which includes stakeholder and data mapping, aiming to improve wildlife and rural crime data and analysis and Programme monitoring

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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