



Wales' Wildlife and Rural Crime Strategy

2023-2025





The establishment of an All-Wales Wildlife & Rural Crime Coordinator provides a single point of contact for organisations... while hopefully improving coordination and uniformity between forces when it comes to policing rural crime. We welcome the ability to provide bespoke feedback that allows for policing methods and knowledge that are specific to the specialist crimes being committed in rural areas. This allows for improved recognition of the particular issues facing rural communities and how these differ from urban or city issues.¹



Contact: wildlife@gov.wales

Crimes should be reported by calling:

- ☒ 999 in an emergency
- ☒ 101 for any non-emergency incidents
- ☒ Via your local police area online website reporting form
- ☒ Or anonymously through CrimeStoppers on 0800 555 111

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Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg hefyd / This document is also available in Welsh
Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg / We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh

1 Stakeholder consultation Dec 2022 – Jan 2023

Foreword

We are delighted to be introducing Wales' first joint Police and Welsh Government Strategy for Wildlife and Rural Crime in Wales. The strategy looks to build upon the individual policing area strategies and the solid bedrock of progress that has been made in recent years across Wales in tackling this important sector of crime.

In June 2021, and in recognition of the unique elements to wildlife and rural crime in Wales, Welsh Government provided the funding for a dedicated post of an All-Wales Wildlife and Rural Crime Co-ordinator. Following the success of the pilot year, a further three years of funding has been committed, taking the programme through until at least June 2025.

Research conducted in Wales found satisfaction and trust in rural policing to be generally positive but suggested the response to some rural crime issues may have been hindered by inadequate training, experience and understanding, as well as resource pressures². In recognition of this, the appointment of a Coordinator provides a single point of contact with knowledge and experience to bring partners together. A significant proportion of time is directed to developing training and opportunities for sharing best practice across all police areas and with partner agencies and organisations.

There are clear indications this is already having a positive effect, with 90% of responses to the stakeholder consultation conducted to inform the drafting of this strategy citing direct benefits or advantages the Coordinator role has provided. A recent report suggested respondents to a survey in Wales believe the police are now taking farm and rural crime more seriously³. The task will be to ensure these positive changes are embedded and can be built upon further. To this end Welsh Government has commissioned an independent evaluation of this programme of work with the aim of developing a theory of change model and a framework upon which we will measure progress in future years.

The Coordinator role is an innovative initiative unique to Wales, designed to respond to Wales' needs, however we recognise there is a fundamental need to work across the border with the police and organisations in England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

This strategy has therefore been designed to dovetail with the National Police Chiefs' Council, National Wildlife Crime Unit, and *National Rural Crime Unit's Rural and Wildlife Crime Strategy for 2022-2025*. To maximise alignment this will be a two-year strategy finishing in 2025 when progress will again be reviewed.

We want to take this opportunity to thank all those working across wildlife and rural crime in Wales, be it the police officers and Community Officers across all four policing areas and those seconded to other agencies, or the stakeholders who so readily engaged with the consultation which has contributed greatly to this new strategy. It is clear there is a wide range of dedicated people working with great professionalism and commitment to detect and prevent wildlife and rural crime, support the victims, and rehabilitate offenders. Much has been achieved already but we recognise there is more that can be done through combining our efforts more effectively. We look forward to working in partnership to achieve the objectives set out in the pages that follow.



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² Morris, Norris & Dowell (2020)

³ Norris & Morris (2022)



Introduction

Wales is a nation rich in culture, community, and environment loved by its people and many visitors alike, but its vast and less-populated countryside can be seen, by some, as an easy target. There are significant challenges to preventing, detecting, and dealing with the aftermath of these rural crimes.

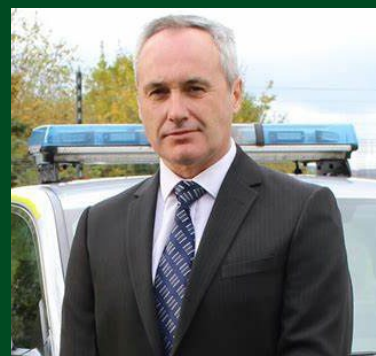
Some crimes, of course, are not unique to rural areas however the way in which they impact victims and the environment, and the strategies for dealing with them, will often need to be tailored quite differently. This strategy reflects those specific needs and as such there are certain variances in the priority areas to those adopted nationally. The intention, however, is always to work with partners elsewhere in the UK whenever there is commonality but also where there are any deviations which can provide valuable insight. The Wales Wildlife & Rural Crime Coordinator is also a member of most of the UK priority groups, and chairs the NPCC UK livestock priority delivery group, having led on this area for several years prior to starting this role.

The cost of rural theft alone in Wales in 2021 has been valued at £1.3m but rural crime levels were overall lower at that time due to Covid-19 restrictions. Early indications from 2022 suggest rural crime is on the increase with the potential to resume to pre-pandemic levels. One survey reveals 89% of people are concerned inflation and the cost of living will result in further increases in incidents of crimes affecting rural communities⁴. There is no doubt there are significant challenges when considering the scale and breadth of wildlife and rural crime. It requires a clear strategic direction; the focussed and collective endeavours of all the partners involved; and measurable objectives. This Strategy is designed to guide those efforts.

The approaches to wildlife crime and rural crime have historically been separate, but for several years police teams in Wales have understood the benefit of combining the two to reduce duplication, improve efficiencies, and maximise resources. Dedicated units trained in a broader range of skills can aid investigations such as poaching which crossover between wildlife and rural crime. We very much welcomed the National Police Chiefs' Council's (NPCC) decision to follow suit with the publication of the new Rural and Wildlife Crime Strategy 2022-25, enabling a closer mirroring of approaches. It isn't possible however to cover all the issues that arise within wildlife and rural crime. The pre-consultation with stakeholders was therefore critical to understanding if the correct priorities were identified by the Coordinator during the pilot year which was done via consultation with the four policing areas, Welsh Government, and other key stakeholders, and within the context of the Threat Assessments at UK level. It is positive the majority of respondents to the consultation supported the identified priorities and a significant number also had suggestions for further developing individual workstreams within them.

There is ongoing work to communicate with stakeholders and partners on how the priorities are balanced, so expectations in relation to resources can be better managed. This does not, however, curtail the ambition to increase capability and capacity. There remains a strong drive across all partners to protect; prevent; and reduce impacts of wildlife and rural crime.

Our Welsh rural communities are served by four dedicated policing areas, each with its own challenges and a bond to provide the best possible service to those in need and to ensure our world-renowned farming produce, rich historical culture, and wildlife and their habitats are preserved for generations to come, enriching our country and maintaining our proud history.



Wildlife and rural crime can come in many forms, whether it be the theft of agricultural equipment, devastating livestock offences or the destruction of wildlife and their habitats, we the police and our key partner agencies have a vital role to play to prevent its occurrence or seek to apprehend those who commit such offences.

A coordinated and strategic approach is the key to success and sustainability and the police, and our partner agencies are at the centre of that progress and success, to facilitate a combined approach to problem solving by using the vast amount of expert knowledge and the wealth of experience we possess throughout Wales and beyond.

This strategy, harmonised with the UK NPCC rural strategy, seeks to provide a clear pathway and guidance to enable those tackling rural offences at the very core, giving them the support, guidance and training required to provide a coordinated and professional approach, thus reducing crime at its source.

As the Wales Rural & Wildlife Crime Coordinator I am proud to facilitate a programme where we can all contribute to the success and the future growth in our rural communities, minimising the risk and fear of crime and maintaining our iconic wildlife, rich heritage and habitats.

Rob Taylor, QPM, Wales Wildlife & Rural Crime Coordinator



Ongoing development

The evaluation of the Coordinator's programme will be enabled through the construction of a Theory of Change to formally set out expectations for anticipated outputs and outcomes, and through the development of metrics to monitor future performance. It is anticipated several of the key stakeholders in Wales will be asked to participate in the development of the Theory of Change and performance metrics however it will not be possible to invite all stakeholders to take part. This independent evaluation is due to be conducted between February and July 2023.

Ongoing engagement

In addition to those agencies and organisations already involved with the work of the Priority Groups within the Wales Wildlife & Rural Crime Coordinator's programme of work, there will be further and more detailed consultations issued in future years to inform the work of the Priority Groups as well as future strategies to continue to engage with all stakeholders.

What is Wildlife & Rural Crime?

These are specific offences that predominantly occur within the countryside, affecting farming and more sparsely populated communities, or our wildlife, habitats, and heritage.

Wildlife crime is any activity that contravenes the legislation which protects Wales' wild animals and plants. A species may be endangered to the point of extinction, many animals suffer persecution and cruelty as a result of a wide range of criminal activities including poaching, coursing, hunting, trading, poisoning and the destruction of a habitat.

Rural crime can be difficult to define as it includes a broad range of crimes some of which are also found – and can be more prevalent – in urban spaces, for instance such as domestic abuse. The circumstances surrounding the incidents of crime in rural areas, the response to those crimes and the access to support for those individuals and communities can, however, be very different. The crimes more unique to rural communities include farm, equines, and heritage. Crimes affecting the environment include fly-tipping and pollution, which also affect agriculture along with theft and livestock worrying, can all have a significant impact on food production. Heritage crime relates to those offences which affect the value of Wales' heritage buildings and sites such as damage to ancient monuments and illegal metal detecting.

Strategy Development

Following the appointment of the Wales Wildlife and Rural Crime Coordinator, the immediate aim was to establish priority areas and the networks to support them to explore how the role might provide positive impacts and added value. Based on the success of the pilot year, further funding was provided by Welsh Government for a three-year period, enabling the development of a strategy in Wales as well as securing the future of the priority groups. Once the new NPCC strategy was published it then became possible to begin development of an all-Wales strategy so that the two may complement each other. A consultation with key stakeholders and the analysis of those responses also forms a critical and substantive element within this strategy, along with recent research into wildlife and rural crime in Wales.

Understanding the context

The Wildlife and Rural Crime portfolio in Wales sits under the NPCC Cymru lead Dr Richard Lewis, Chief Constable of Dyfed-Powys Police. While Policing and the Criminal Justice system is not devolved in Wales, the conditions that give rise to crime; its effects upon people, the environment and animals; as well as significant portions of law – for example wildlife – are within the portfolio of Welsh Government Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales & Trefnydd, Lesley Griffiths MS.

Although the UK Government led on the request for the International Consortium on Combatting Wildlife Crime Toolkit assessment (under the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime), the report: *The Wildlife and Forest Crime Analytic Toolkit Report: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, published in 2021, also covers Wales. Its assessment and recommendations were utilised in the construction of the NPCC strategy and by extension have influenced the development of this strategy.

Wildlife and Rural Crime Consultation Outcomes

A targeted stakeholder consultation was issued in December 2022 by the Coordinator and the Welsh Government Wildlife team. A total of 29 responses was received. Responses came direct from wildlife and rural crime police officers, Police & Crime Commissioners, statutory bodies, and a wide range of NGOs representing the victims of crime and those working within the environment and/or with animals.

86% of respondents agree the profile of wildlife and rural crime has increased in the past 18 months, with the remaining 14% unsure. 75% could directly attribute better relationships with others involved in tackling wildlife and rural crime, to the role of the Coordinator, with a further 17% keen to make better use of this resource.

The majority had some form of contact with their local Wildlife & Rural Crime police officers but almost all would like substantially more, further demonstrating a real appetite for partnership working.

69% of respondents confirmed their organisation has the relevant strategy in relation to the role they play within wildlife and rural crime, with a substantial number having adopted a problem-solving approach to crime. The majority of the remaining 31% either have the relevant purposes set out in their objectives or are working to introduce a new organisational strategy. Several respondents stated they are waiting for the publication of this strategy before devising or revising their own – which is encouraging for bringing about alignment of the partners in Wales.

Not all the key stakeholders surveyed hold data in relation to wildlife and rural crime however the 62% that do stated they are willing to share within the parameters of responsible data-sharing. The disparity in the way crimes are recorded was also noted to be problematic especially as it hampers any assessment of the true impact of criminality in rural areas.

The vast majority have a social media presence, some with a significant following, and there was a genuine desire to produce coordinated campaigns. Some police areas also have community alert or notification systems (or are looking to install shortly) and this offers an additional avenue for communicating key messages about the wildlife and rural crime initiatives as well as gathering information in too.



The coordination role has fundamentally enabled police leaders to link up with specialist group experts to upskill everyone concerned and to foster greater awareness and understanding of our disparate role limitations and expectations.⁵

Of the responses from within the police in Wales, all teams had made use of the various courses that had been provided during the first 18 months of the programme, and there were several suggestions for new courses such as vehicle theft, firearms and additional farm experiences. Non-police responses also offered to provide additional training in a wide range of subjects, which further highlights the significant benefits of partnership working and regularly consulting stakeholders.

⁵ Stakeholder consultation Dec 2022 – Jan 2023



We have engaged with the online sessions and found most to be helpful and informative. The Farm awareness course was well received by all officers, more practical courses like these would also be well received.⁵



Strategic Aim

To further develop an all-Wales coordinated and effective response to wildlife and rural crime; a response which is tailored to Wales' needs; supporting policing and its partners to prevent crime, pursue those who commit it, and protect those most affected by it. The communities, individuals, habitats and wildlife most at risk of harm will be the central focus.

Strategic Objectives:

Partnerships

Work in partnership to reduce crime and protect rural communities and wildlife. Develop effective networks to share ideas, best practice, and resources.



Victims

Improve the knowledge and skills needed to support victims affected by crime in rural areas especially those most vulnerable.



Capacity & Skills

Provide training and opportunities to develop skills in a broad range of wildlife and rural crime issues, maximising use of partner agencies.



Intelligence

Improve data collection and information sharing among partners and enforcement agencies.



Technology

Use technology and innovation to protect rural communities and wildlife.



Criminal Justice

Work with all partners to identify improvements in legislation, sentencing and recording of crimes. Facilitate the use of Probation Service community.



Engagement

Develop communication plans, engaging with all forms of media and provide a visible presence to raise awareness of operations, outcomes, and prevention work. Explore opportunities within academia and research to assist with engagement as well as developing the understanding of these crimes and their impact.



How will we deliver the strategy?

The Wildlife and Rural Crime Coordinator has already established the Priority Groups, each with terms of reference. These Groups will now follow the same NPCC strategy with a 4P plan, as well as specific objectives that are measurable and achievable, directly linked to the overall strategy. The 4P plan, in conjunction with the Theory of Change and framework of metrics being developed during Q1 and Q2 of 2023, will enable the Groups to develop their objectives to allow for performance and outcomes to be tracked. **The 4Ps are:**

Prepare

Prepare for when wildlife and rural crime may occur, preventing where possible and mitigating its impact through efficient use of intelligence, data and technology.

Prevent

Preventing and deterring people from engaging in wildlife and rural crime through effective partnerships, media and communication, and public engagement.

Pursue

Relentlessly pursue offenders with particular focus on serious and organised criminals, using our criminal justice partners to prosecute, and to disrupt and deter offending through effective enforcement tactics.

Protect

Protect rural communities and wildlife from the impact of crime through a coordinated national effort utilising all resources and increasing the capacity and capability of police and partners.





Priority Groups Overview

Bird Crime

Offences against birds are not only confined to birds of prey (raptors) but also to our more urban species and those that frequent our vast coastline. Offences can include poisoning; nest destruction; trapping; habitat damage; egg theft; trade; and illegal shooting.

The group works to identify those offences and areas in Wales that pose the most threat to birds. Via joint targeted partnership and police operations, officer training, intelligence sharing, and raising public awareness of the main issues the group seeks to target problem areas and by joint thinking seek ways of making change. The Bird Crime group also has members who sit within the UK Bird of Prey Persecution Group.

Operation Seabird Cymru is a sub-group of the Bird Crime group and addresses offences on our coastal areas, including disturbance of mammals.

Objectives:

- Reduce all bird offences within Wales.
- Raise awareness of all bird offences.
- Improve knowledge and training within the police and partner agencies.

Farm Crime

Most rural offences and crimes reported to the police in Wales are those involving farms and our rural communities. Crimes and offences include thefts of machinery, tools and vehicles; livestock attacks by dogs; arson; burglary; and theft of livestock; fuel; or working dogs. Equine offences and thefts are also included within the context of this group.

The group seeks to coordinate action and awareness between the police and key partner agencies including the farming unions. The impact of farm offences is significant to our rural communities as livelihoods and production suffer due to the costs involved and the importance of machinery and vehicles to the farming community. Raising awareness of these offences is key to our farming communities as is preventing offences and seeking ways of providing the police with better powers to deal with offences, such as changing the law to prevent livestock offences and assist investigations.

Officer training is also vital in understanding the business and the associated issues and impacts of farm crime. A bespoke farm course in Wales has now seen over 60 officers in Wales provided with that vital knowledge.

Objectives:

- Reduce the forms of crime occurring within the farming environment.
- Supply officers and partners with specialist training and knowledge of farming practices and associated pressures.
- Engage with our farming communities directly and through associated partner agencies and livestock markets.



Habitats

The habitats of Wales support our eco-systems and wildlife, and thus the prevention of offences in our rural areas is vital to maintaining them. Offences include fly Tipping; illegal off-roading; invasive plants and species; heritage crime; and damage to protected SSSI areas (Sites of Special Scientific Interest). The group seeks to identify issues throughout Wales by working closely with our partner agencies and experts in order to be best placed to tackle offences. Education, prevention and enforcement form essential elements to any action plan.

Two sub-groups exist with regular training events and awareness:

Operation Heritage Cymru – A project to work with CADW and other partner agencies to prevent damage or degradation to our heritage sites. This project also utilises the training of rural officers and the engagement of police cadets.

Operation Taurus Cymru – A joint approach to tackle illegal off-roading throughout Wales is key to preventing the dispersal of offences from one area to another. Awareness of the damage that is caused alongside targeted enforcement is a key tactic of the group in preventing such offences.

Objectives:

- Co-ordinate with key partners agencies to ensure more effective and closer working practices .
- Seek to develop a greater understanding of the effects certain offences can have on our habitats and heritage.
- Deploy direct proactive action through both police and partners to prevent and detect offences through operations and education.

Mammals and EPS⁶

Wales has a diverse cross section of wildlife, and criminal activity can often arise threatening their welfare and sustainability, including bat offences; deer poaching; illegal hunting; badger offences; as well as criminal activities which affect flora and fauna protected under CITES or European Protected Species.

The group brings together police and key partners to identify problem areas and seek ways of preventing these offences. Awareness of the issues is key, but also enforcement has a vital role when certain offences arise. This group brings together a wealth of knowledge and experience to address issues and ties in with the various UK priority groups for a crossover of best practice and knowledge. Unconsented planning work can have a devastating effect on certain species, so it is vital we work with our local authorities to prevent these from occurring.

Objectives:

- Ensure an immediate and professional response to all reported offences involving mammals and European Protected Species (EPS).
- Improve knowledge and best practice in dealing with potential species offences.
- Utilise specialist knowledge from other agencies to aid investigation and prosecutions of offences.



⁶ European Protected Species



Welsh Police Rural Supervisors

Wales currently has four policing areas Dyfed Powys; Gwent; North Wales; and South Wales.

Each of these areas has a rural crime police resource relevant to their area's needs. Although each area has its own specific rural issues there is a vast amount of commonality. This small but impactful working group coordinates the four rural police teams in Wales to enable: best practice; intelligence sharing; joint resources; initiatives; operations; and joint media and social media campaigns. This group meets monthly to discuss current trends and future planning of seasonal issues throughout rural Wales.

Objectives:

- Ensure a dedicated resource is retained in each policing area to provide the best possible service.
- Develop systems to enable greater knowledge transfer within police teams.
- Identify training needs and provide appropriate resources to meet demand, including the sharing of intelligence and best practice.

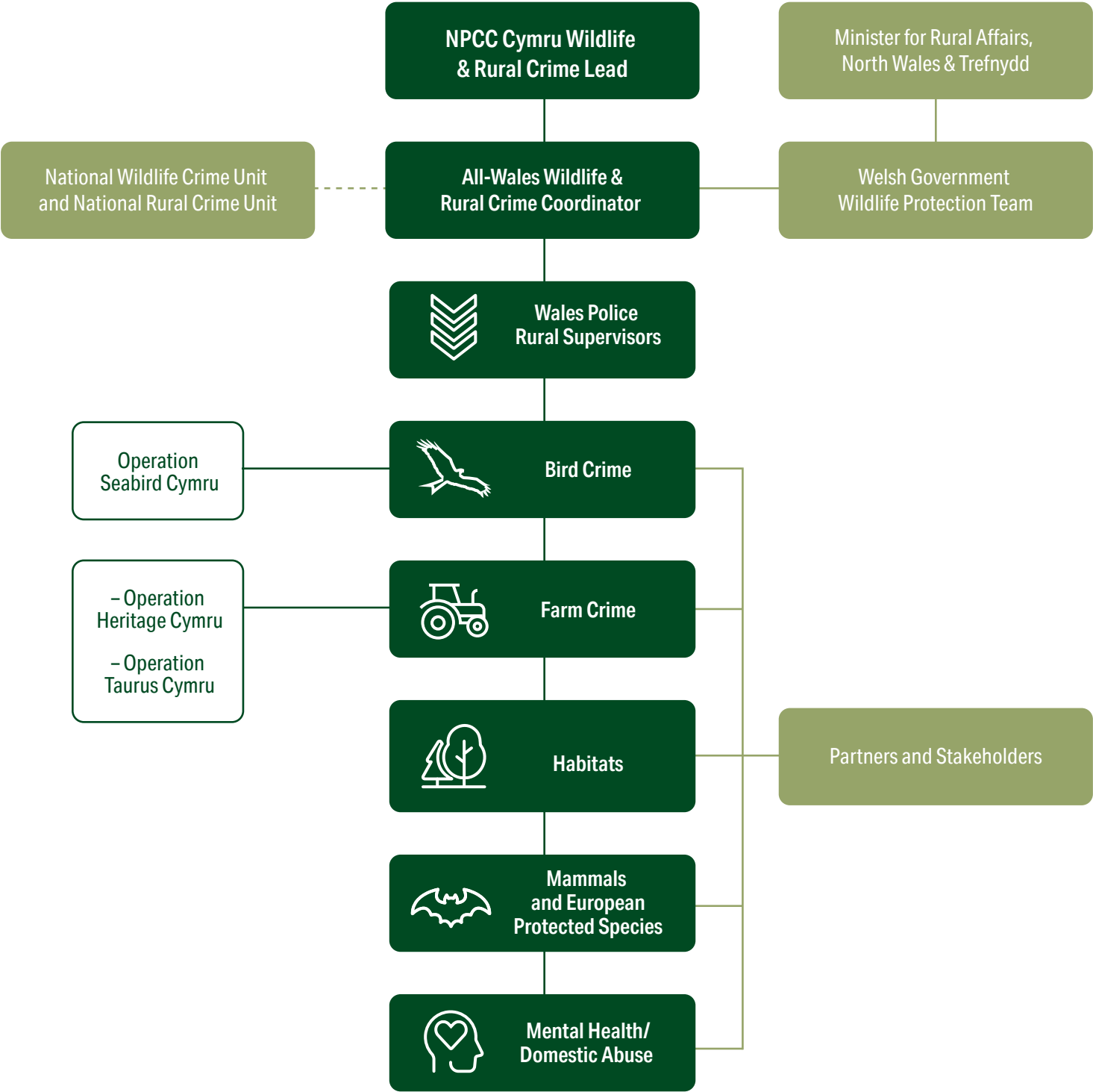
Mental Health & Domestic Abuse

Although each of these subjects is vast in its itself and critically important work is being conducted by dedicated agencies and partners in Wales, this Priority group brings together key organisations and rural police who are often the first to engage with a victim or patient in the rural setting. The group provides the key coordination and joined-up approach required to provide specific training, knowledge, and support. These important issues are not unique to the urban environment but occur in rural communities where the conditions that give rise to problems, and the solutions to dealing with them will often be very different. The police and our supporting agencies can give that frontline service, working closely together to provide essential services and better protection, as well as raising awareness within our farming communities.

Objectives:

- Provide the vital training needed for officers and partner agencies in dealing with a crisis in rural areas.
- Increase the knowledge within the police and partner agencies of the resources and support available.
- Understand the rural environment and the pressures within the farming industry and what support is available.

All Wales Wildlife and Rural Crime Governance Structure





We are honoured to be interacting as an invited partner with Wildlife & Rural crime police officers in Wales. This has hugely increased our ability to operate in a more collaborative and effective way. For us, Wales leads the UK in this respect.⁶



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Websites

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www.nationalruralcrimenetwork.net

www.nwcu.police.uk

