

CAN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING GUARANTEE PROVE EFFECTIVE IN RURAL SPACES?

Rural Criminology Policy Note #3
April 2026

Executive Summary

Changes to policing in England and Wales are in progress. An earlier Policy Note explores the Police Reform White Paper through a rural lens. However, a key underpinning tenet of Police Reform over the last 12 months has been the launch of the Neighbourhood Policing Guaranteeⁱ – launched in May 2025. Given the importance of this policy to the future reforms to the structure of policing in England and Wales, it is important to understand how the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee (NPG) will be operationalised in rural spaces. There is much talk about towns and high streets, but can the NPG really work for everyone? A detailed review of this policy has highlighted several aspects that the government should consider as wider police reforms take shape to ensure that they work for everyone, regardless of where they live.

ISSUE

1. This Note is produced by Dr Kreseda Smith and reflects the key issues identified from a review of the NPG and its related Theory of Change and measures of success when considered through a rural lens. This work highlights the main aspects of the policy that will affect rural community confidence, operational policing in rural spaces, and notes the need for the government to better engage with a wide range of rural stakeholders and communities to ensure that the future of neighbourhood policing that will be taken forward in the proposed policing reforms will be fit for purpose for communities living and working in rural landscapes across England and Wales.

KEY JUDGEMENTS:

2. **The recipient is invited to agree that:**
 - a. **There is a real danger that the NPG will not be fit for purpose for rural communities due to its focus on towns and high streets.**
 - b. **There is a need to better understand how rural spaces fit into the recommended neighbourhood policing guidelines, and therefore the pillars of the NPG.**
 - c. **There is a need to recognise that some of the evidence relied upon in the 2018 Rapid Evidence**

Assessment (REA) is out of date and actually highlights problems with proposed approaches taken.

- d. **There are systemic issues within policing that need to be addressed before rural communities can be properly served through a minimum level of service promised by the NPG.**
- e. **Despite headline figures, the true resourcing of the NPG plans is not significant enough to ensure appropriate and equitable resourcing across both urban and rural neighbourhoods.**

Problem Definition

3. Rural policing seems to be constantly overlooked in favour of high volume, hot-spot policing targets focused in urban and peri-urban areas across England and Wales. This is despite more than 17% of the total population of England and Wales living in rural areas. Many police forces – in their existing form – include large areas of countryside within their borders but often receive lower per capita funding under the Police Allocation Formula. The geographic spread of people within rural communities makes it hard for many police forces to adequately resource police services in these areas. The NPG suggests an evidence-based approach to changing the way community policing is undertaken. But does it consider the true variety of landscapes across England and Wales in its suggestions?

Key Findings

4. **Exclusionary language:** The primary issue that should be highlighted in relation to the NPG and its linked documents is that 'rural' is not mentioned once across the equivalent of 78 pages of text relating to the NPG^{i, ii}. The focus throughout reads as though it has been drafted with town and city centres in mind. Indeed, the fifth pillar of the Theory of Change model that has been developed for this policy is Safer Town Centres. While it is acknowledged the urban-centric crimes are problematic, these documents do not consider the impact of crime and criminal activity on communities outside of those urban islands. Despite the noises being made in the documentation around engaging communities, the wording used in the policy documents

immediately exclude rural communities from being a part of this change. Neither does it suggest that things will change in rural communities in relation to policing, police presence, or police engagement.

5. Outdated evidence: The College of Policing undertook research which led to the 2018 REA summaryⁱⁱⁱ. This REA provided a thorough review of neighbourhood policing research findings. It was this summary that provided the six guidelines that have driven the development of the NPG: engaging communities; solving problems; targeting activity; promoting the right culture; building analytical capability; and developing officers, staff, and volunteers. While the REA summary helped to develop these guidelines which are situated around neighbourhood policing based on the evidence reviewed, this REA is now 8 years old, and things have changed globally since then, and certainly since some of the evidence was developed. One of the programmes that is referred to is that of the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) established in the mid-1990s during a period of high levels of violent crime in the city. The programme engaged in widespread community engagement and visible policing. This approach proved to be a great success, and the research highlights this, particularly that from Skogan (2005)^{iv}. What the REA did not consider was the significant impact the 'Great Recession' and the financial market crash had on the programme. Over the period 2007 to 2014, the CAPS programme was decimated due to budget cuts, leadership changes, and reducing community engagement^v. It is concerning at this point that the situation in England and Wales does not seem conducive to a similar programme working due to the current cost of living crisis, and political instability both at home and abroad. And this comes before any such programme has had a chance to prove itself as CAPS did.

6. Systemic issues in policing: Operational definitions of neighbourhood policing remain unclear, particularly how it differs from existing rural policing. Without clarity, confidence in rural areas is unlikely to improve, as communities still do not know who to contact. Forces also continue to lack sufficient analytical capability to turn community information into operational intelligence. As highlighted in the Police Reform White Paper, siloed working persists and will continue to hinder effective information and intelligence sharing. Although a Neighbourhood Policing pathway is proposed, it is unclear why this is not integrated into the later stages of the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship, avoiding disruption to

NP duties for CPD. There is also no clear mechanism for how communities hold police to account under NPG, what minimum service standards look like, or how NP performance data will be made transparent. Finally, several assumptions in the TOC appear unrealistic, including that increased police visibility will reliably improve feelings of safety, that the wider CJS will have additional capacity, and that increased reporting should be viewed as a risk to NPG success.

7. Resourcing neighbourhood policing: There remains confusion as to whether the NPG will provide support and protection to rural crime teams – who already operate as rural NP teams – relating to abstraction. The headline figure of 13,000 new NP staff is misleading. When considering the aim of NP areas to be aligned with council ward areas, this equates to an average of 1.7 persons per NP area – many of whom will cover towns and cities based on the focus of the NPG. It does not account for the need for better resourcing around equipment, vehicles, and kit for rural policing. Nor does it clarify as to how NP will link with rural crime teams.

8. Key priorities going forward: NP officers and staff need to be able to get out into their neighbourhood areas to be visible and engage with rural communities. It is recognised that this is much more difficult in rural areas than in towns and cities, however the minimum level of service must be met regardless of location. It is noted in the REA that visibility is not enough to build trust. As such, Rural Crime Teams in partnership with the rural NP teams need to work together to build these relationships from the ground up to enable procedural justice and legitimacy to be seen to happen within the rural space. It is important that this relationship-building happens immediately to enable the communities to learn about their policing team, and for the policing team to get to know their communities. This will develop understanding on both sides. This priority action is essential to help address other aspects of the REA guidelines, such as building trust to enable reporting so that the SARA model to problem-solving can work effectively in the rural, and building confidence in the police to understand specific rural issues and develop the information-sharing that is so essential to develop intelligence around rural offender patterns, who are often offending in urban areas also.

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ⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neighbourhood-policing-guarantee-performance-framework>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-secretary-letter-on-the-neighbourhood-policing-guarantee>;
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neighbourhood-policing-guarantee-performance-framework>; https://assets.college.police.uk/s3fs-public/2021-02/np_rea_summary.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ https://assets.college.police.uk/s3fs-public/2021-02/np_rea_summary.pdf

^{iv} Skogan, W. (2005) Evaluating community policing in Chicago. In R.K. Kerley (Ed.) Policing and program evaluation. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 27-41.

^v Skogan, W. (2022)

<https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6284&context=ucirev>