

Written Evidence submitted by Robert Killen (MH0001)

I am Robert Killen. I am a Land Agent based in Gloucestershire. I am fully involved in rural life and communities having acted a Parish Clerk and recently retired as Chairman of Gloucestershire CLA. I acted as Chair of Avon and Somerset Police Authority's Rural Crime Forum.

Over the last ten years I have become more aware and concerned about mental health in rural communities.

Firstly I think it is worth noting that when we set up the Avon and Somerset Police Authority's Rural Crime Forum we expected to spend the meeting examining rural crime but it quickly became clear how important mental health issues were couple with a distinct lack of communication between stakeholders (e.g. Police, Local Government, Trading Standards, Environment Agency, Public Health Authorities, National Parks etc)

Particular points that I would put forward are:

- Local crime is a particular driver for unsettling rural communities. This was not confined to 'rural' crime but crime more widely including anti-social behaviour.
- The farming community are particularly hard hit by the challenges of farming. Financial difficulties and difficulties with the Rural Payments Agency are two drivers.
- Major incidents such as floods, TB, storms or Covid can be triggers for mental ill health.
- Domestic issues of all types cause issues.
- Bereavement can be an issue. People in rural communities can be more reliant on family members with death causing a larger void.
- Loneliness is another issue, not helped by Covid more recently.
- A fear of attending counselling as this is seen as failure.
- The police tend to be at the forefront of confronting mental health issues. This was abundantly clear during the time I spent as Chair of the Rural Crime Forum.
- The work done by farming charities such as RABI, Farming Friend and Young Farmers organisations is outstanding but they rely on donations and fundraising. NFU and CLA are similarly good support agencies.
- There is an inclination for rural folk not to talk about their problems until it is too late.

On solutions:

- Financial support for farming and rural charities.
- Support for police forces and similar stakeholders such as RPA (please note RPA much better than it used to be) to increase understanding of rural mental health issues.
- Establishing clear channels of communication and who to contact in that moment of desperation.
- Better education of stakeholders and matters such as speaking about your problems, counselling and tell tale signs.
- Good listeners – GPs/Family members/Friends/Banks/Professional advisers etc.
- Creation of local schemes/contacts.

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