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Peer Review of the Warwickshire Police Response to Hunt related incidents

1 Executive Summary

The National Police Coordination Centre, were asked by Warwickshire Police to coordinate a peer review regarding their policing of hunt related activity.

The review aims to support continuous improvement in policing hunt-related activities, focusing on strategy, policy, planning, and stakeholder engagement. The terms of reference of the review were agreed with Warwickshire Police in advance, and involved evaluation of key documents and then a series of meetings that involved strategic, tactical leads, operational officers including the Rural Crime Team. The scope did not involve historical nor specific events, investigations or operations, nor does it seeks to duplicate other previous reviews. Its focus was on current documentation and to support a forward looking approach by Warwickshire Police on this issue.

The review team was made up of representatives from:

- The National Police Coordination Centre
- The National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU)
- Norfolk Constabulary

and included consultation and engagement with:

- NPCC lead for hunting
- Warwickshire Police – strategic, tactical and operational staff
- Warwickshire Hunt
- Volunteers that are opposed to hunting and associated activities

The review makes 11 recommendations for Warwickshire Police, which are now a matter for the force to consider how and whether they wish to take them forward.

1 Introduction

The National Police Coordination Centre (NPoCC) were asked by Warwickshire Police (WP) to conduct a peer review regarding their policing of hunt related activity. As outlined below, with the agreement of the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) Wildlife Crime portfolio lead, the review team included representation from both the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) and Norfolk Constabulary (NC).

1.1 Terms of Reference

The over-arching aim is to, positively and constructively, support the continuous improvement of hunt policing both locally and nationally.

1. To collate existing identified learning, combining self-reflection with external and independent input.
2. To identify opportunities for improvement in police strategy, policy, planning and stakeholder engagement.
3. To support strategic and tactical operational considerations.
4. To support WP in their development of an action plan to improve legitimacy and effectiveness in this area of policing.

1.2 Scope

The following were agreed as within scope of this peer review:

- This process is not a structured debrief of a particular event, operation, investigation, or complaint. This peer review will focus on the strategy, policy and approach the Force takes towards the policing of hunting.
- WP will own the final report, which will be produced at a classification allowing FOI or other external release if approved by WP.
- Warwickshire Police undertake to share regional/national learning with the NPCC as appropriate for the benefit for wider UK policing.

The following were agreed as out of scope:

- Any specific matters subject of criminal or professional standards investigation will be out of scope.

Additionally, the intention was not to review previous reviews but to consider the current position and seek to make recommendations for considerations as WP prepares for the start of the 2025/26 hunt season.

2 Methodology

2.1 Contributors

The following were members of the peer review team:

- Head of Operations. NPoCC – independent review coordination
- Head of NWCU – subject matter expertise
- Ops Sergeant Norfolk Constabulary – operational expertise
- Wildlife Crime Officer and Hunt SPOC, Norfolk Constabulary – operational expertise

2.2 Phases of Review

The review was conducted using the following phases:

- Phase 1: documentary review and search of WP website
- Phase 2: interviews and focus groups.
 - a) Police – key individuals and wider discussion group
 - b) Stakeholder and Partner interviews
 - c) Frontline staff focus group
- Phase 3: hot debrief and report
- Phase 4: advisory support to WP in the development of a Force action plan.

2.3 Outcomes

The following were agreed as outputs:

- Overview report – including single-side Exec summary: to include observations and recommendations for WP.
- Follow up consultation – to support Warwickshire in the development of a Force action plan, to ensure all aspects of the peer review are captured and considered.

2.4 Documents provided for review

The following documents were provided by WP for the team to review prior to interviews and focus groups:

- 'Op Stray Strategy Document'*
- 'Minor Op - Warwickshire Hunt Events – Op Ordino v1.1'
- 'Op Expect Policing Guide v2.0'*

- 'Review of policing of activities related to hunting' Dec 2024*
- Guidance on lawful trail hunting and lawful protest activities – from WP website*
- Protocol between The Warwickshire Hunt and The Warwickshire Police – from WP website*
- Force response to review into policing activities related to hunting – from WP website (Force News – 08/01/2025)*

*Documents not appended but available publicly either on the OPCC Warwickshire or WP website.

2.5 Review Team Visit to Warwickshire

The review team visited WP HQ on Monday 31st March and Tuesday 1st April 2025 and conducted interviews and focus groups as follows:

- Strategic and Communications (ACC and Head of Corporate Communications)
- Rural Crime Coordinator
- Tactical (Chief Inspector Portfolio Lead)
- Operational Forum – Contact and Control room staff (not able to attend), Neighbourhood Officers, Rural Crime Unit Officers, Duty and Locality Inspector and member of Learning and Development department.
- MS Teams meet with volunteers suggested by WP from the Warwickshire Hunt
- MS Teams meet with volunteers suggested by WP who are opposed to hunting and associated activities.

3 Findings

3.1 Strategy

The ACC confirmed the intention of WP is to work in partnership to keep communities safe and ensuring, as far as possible, to balance the rights of people participating in the legal activity of trail hunts, those monitoring or protesting over alleged illegal hunting and communities going about their normal business. WP intend to do this in line with their core policing responsibilities of:

- The protection of life and property
- The prevention and detection of crime and disorder
- The maintenance of the King's Peace

There is specific mention of *'reducing crime in rural areas'* and *'building broader capacity to tackle rural, heritage and wildlife crime issues which affect the rural population'* as one of the local priorities under the 'Protecting Communities' pillar within the Warwickshire Police and Crime Plan 2025-29.

WP benefit from a dedicated Rural Crime Team (RCT) which consists of 1 sergeant, 1 police staff coordinator and 8 constables. A Chief Inspector currently owns 'rural crime' as a portfolio. The team work early and late shifts the team operate a 'spoke and hub' model and are described as a thematic Safer Neighbourhood Team who activity seek to engage with communities and key stakeholders. The 2024/25 Rural Crime Team Strategy is described as:

- Target Criminality and Investigations.
- Engagement and Prevention
- Rural Community Harm, Emerging Threats and Rural Hotspot policing
- Hunt management

The review team have considered the current WP strategy which is entitled 'Warwickshire Hunt' and was written in May 2023. WP have stated that this strategy is due to be reviewed on the bi-annual anniversary (May 2025).

This Force Strategy lists the second strategic objective as to '**Facilitate legal hunting activities, monitoring and peaceful protests**. Provide a lawful and proportionate response to any reports, balancing the needs and rights of those involved with those impacted by the activity'.

The review team felt that the term '*facilitate*' means to make something easier and that the use of the word could be interpreted as a positive obligation for officers and a potential move away from core policing responsibilities. A position of WP not obstructing legal activities such as trail hunting, monitoring of a hunt and peaceful protest is more appropriate.

The review team felt all other strategic objectives were proportionate and it was positive that objective 3.2 recognised that there is a distinction between those that choose to monitor a hunt and those that choose to protest.

Recommendation WP1 – Review of Force Strategy regarding Policing of Hunt related Activities and specifically the use of the term 'facilitate'.

3.2 Force Position Statement and Relevant Guidance Documents

WP have published a 'Force position on trail-hunting' at: [Force position on trail hunting | Warwickshire Police](#)

The review team concluded that the Force position clearly outlined a fair, just and proportionate position. It is note worthy that the Force position outlines several potential barriers to successful prosecution that may be presented; some of the issues at hand are also mentioned in 'Guidance on lawful trail hunting and lawful protest activities' document which is also published on the WP website.

The position statement mentions '*We acknowledge, in equal measure, that those who are opposed to hunting have the right to protest.*'

There appears no distinction between those that choice to monitor and report / record alleged offences and those that choose to protest.

On 9th August 2023 WP published a protocol that had been agreed between The Warwickshire Hunt (WH) and WP that covered 2023/24 season. As stated within the document, the purpose of the protocol was to improve communication between WH and WP thereby better protecting road users, members of the public and members of the Hunt. The protocol has been described as no longer being in place due to having been replaced by the below mentioned guidance document.

The WP website describes 'guidance on lawful trail hunting and lawful protest activities' at: [Guidance on lawful trail hunting and lawful protest activities | Warwickshire Police](#)

The guidance sets out expectations to both '*lawful hunt related activities*' and '*lawful protest*'. Representatives from the WH agreed and supported both the protocol and the guidance on WP website.

Representatives opposed to hunt activity outlined the publication of the guidance as being a barrier to effective engagement.

Under the heading '*lawful protest*' the first point reads '*take steps to ensure that no Hunt Monitor shall trespass on any land*'. The review team felt that it could be perceived by those wishing to monitor the Hunt will likely be treated as a protestor even if it was not their intention to protest. The strategy makes the distinction between monitor and protestor, but the guidance does not.

The guidance document states at point 3 '*Take steps to ensure that no Hunt Monitor shall act in a manner that is likely to cause a nuisance or annoyance to others when in a public or private place, this includes words or behaviour that are offensive, threatening or abusive and can be towards members of the public or police*'. No such expectation is made under '*Lawful Hunt related activities*'. The review team felt this invited a perception of an assumption of the standard of behaviour and questioned if it is necessary.

The guidance document states at point 4 '*To provide any video or audio recordings made by protest participants immediately upon request by Warwickshire Police, unedited.*' The review team understood the intent of WP was to ensure that best evidence is secured in the event of any offences being identified. It is recognised that this point is made under the '*Lawful Hunt related activities*' but the review team felt that there could be benefit in more explanation of this expectation and the benefit of any group or individual doing so, namely: to assist police to secure prosecution with use of best evidence where offences are identified.

The guidance document states at point 5 '*Maintain accurate roster of attendees. Provide a copy of the same roster to police immediately upon request to the Rural Crime Team*'. Similar expectation is made under the '*Lawful Hunt related activities*' heading. The review team felt that there would be benefit in further explanation of the reasons why such information could be of benefit in light of there being no legal power to require or expect such information.

The review team could not find any other examples of where WP had published similar guidance such as with reference to wider protest. The review team felt that WP had issued the guidance with the right intentions but that there was a risk that the guidance, in its current form, could be perceived as imbalanced in its approach to the numerous parties involved. Additionally, as is mentioned in section 3.6, representatives opposed to hunting suggested the this existence of this guidance document was a barrier to future engagement.

Recommendation WP2 – consider revision or withdrawal of the current guidance on lawful trail hunting and lawful protest activities, in the context of revised Force position statement providing an opportunity to clarify WP's intentions.

3.3 Operational Plans and Officer Deployment

3.3.1 *Officer Deployment*

WP described deploying officers in small numbers (up to 2 RCT officers along with 2 Neighbourhood Policing officers) to approximately 12 hunt events in the 2024/25 season. Their deployment is described as for the purposes of *'not to directly 'police' the event – but to manage and deal with community tensions, public order concerns, traffic management and complaints. Any obvious offences identified (rural or otherwise - are still to be dealt with positively but to provide the necessary visible reassurance to both sides and the community affected.'*

The tactical lead confirmed that the operational plan would be accompanied with a suitable briefing to officers prior to deployment and officers that had been deployed felt suitably aware of the force position and what was expected of them.

WP confirmed that there was one crime recorded during the 2024/25 hunt season, and this is currently being investigated. The new season presented as an opportunity to consider officer deployment taking account of threat and risk which would include that to public confidence and trust.

3.3.2 *Operation Ordino Operational Plan and Order*

Op Ordino is the operational plan that outlines WP policing of Warwickshire Hunt events. An associated operational order is made available to deployed officers. The order gives background information and outlines intentions.

The Op Expect guidance document is available to officers and contains a significant amount of information regarding 'key points for attending officers', event history and information and police powers and relevant legislation.

The review team accepted that it is likely that more direction would be offered to deployed officers in briefings ahead of deployment, however the team felt that more detailed direction would likely benefit the policing response in the form of immediate actions and considerations. Some of which is already covered in Op Expect guidance but this list of action / considerations could be added to taking account of learning from that used in Forces such as Leicestershire and Norfolk.

Examples of key issues to consider including in orders and briefing to officers will be how best to capture evidence in the event that a crime is suspected. Also, guidance in terms of considerations specific to a hunt event scenario that would better inform an officers considerations around the necessity test for arrest as outlined in section 24 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

3.3.4 *Contact and Control Room (CCR) and Spontaneous officer Deployment*

It was not possible for CCR staff to join the focus group, however the tactical lead confirmed that WP do make use of a Storm MA tag system to identify possible Op Ordino calls and that the RCT conduct regular searches of both the Storm command and control system and on Athena and any calls or recorded crime likely to be associated with rural crime and specifically hunt related activity.

Neighbourhood officers confirmed that they were aware of Op Ordino as a result of internal communications on the Force intranet. The review team understand that cue cards or 'drop down immediate actions' are not available to control room staff. As mentioned above the review team felt there could be operational benefit in both CCR and responding officers having access to a list of immediate actions. Good examples from both Norfolk and Leicestershire can be provided to WP for consideration. The tactical lead confirmed that work is underway to produce an aide memoire for the use of officers.

Recommendation WP3 – To review the Op Ordino tactical plan and associated operational orders in-line with the national decision-making model and consider greater direction of expected action for officers deployed.

Recommendation WP4 – To consider the future level of officer deployment to Hunt events following an assessment of threat and risk.

Recommendation WP5 – To consider producing immediate actions to be available to officers deployed and contact and control staff managing both spontaneous calls for service and planned events.

3.4 Decision Making

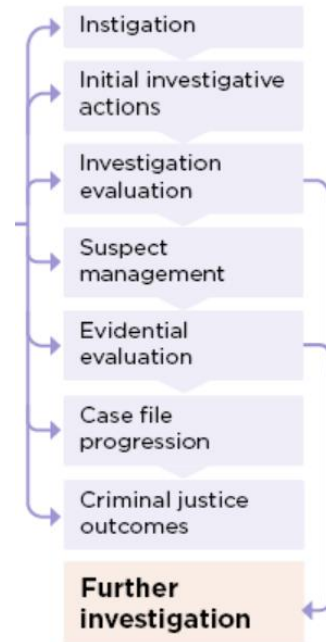
Those opposed to hunting described frustration caused by previous WP responses to the submission of evidence of alleged offences. They mentioned that responses regarding police seeking to prosecute had either not been received or were received too late to support a possible prosecution for summary only offences. Those submitting evidence of possible road safety concerns had been referred to WP's Operation Snap team but this had led to no action and no explanation. On one occasion representatives stated that a hard drive containing evidence had reportedly been lost by police.

Those opposed to hunting expressed the view that WP appeared unwilling to seek to prosecute offences and that this led to a lack of confidence and reluctance to submit further evidence.

Both the RCT and the tactical lead explained that on receipt of submitted evidence that they would seek to follow the recognised phases of an investigation as outlined in the College of Policing approved professional practice document as shown across the page.

The RCT described the benefit of seeking advice where appropriate from the WP legal team and from the Crown Prosecution Service in the event of considering building a case for prosecution or possible civil remedies. The review team felt this was good practice.

The tactical WP lead outlined that there had been occasions where edited video footage had been submitted and that the non-availability of unedited footage would have significantly lessened the value of that evidence to the point where successful prosecution would not be likely. The guidance document referred to earlier outlines of expectations for those wanting to submit evidence.



The review team is aware of the previous issuing and then withdrawal of a Community Protection Notice (CPN) to WH. The issuing of this CPN is outside of scope of this review, however the team are aware of other Forces who have issued warnings / notices and of the need to ensure consistency across forces. The review team noted that NWCUC are considering the setting up of a Wildlife Crime Civil Powers Advisory Board to offer guidance and advice to Forces aimed to deliver national consistency.

The review team concluded that there appeared to be a gap between the actions WP would intend to take on receipt of evidence and the perception of what action would be taken by those that may submit evidence of alleged offences. The team felt that it would be beneficial to provide clarity for anyone concerned as to the investigation process and specifically the issues to be considered at the point of initial investigative evaluation.

The College of Policing publish a section on ‘working with victims and witnesses’ within the Investigations authorised policing practice which outlines good practice for police.

The review team felt that the understanding of the process by any interested party could be improved by outlining and documenting the process of investigation and crime recording and key considerations including signposting to guidance that WP would operate to. In effect this would provide indication of what can be expected of WP and how persons reporting potential crimes can best help WP to correctly record and investigate.

It is understood that reported crime and incidents are recorded on the Athena corporate crime, incident, intelligence and investigations system.

Recommendation WP6 – To consider consolidating existing Warwickshire Police guidance and that provided by APP, to produce a process map and explanation of actions to be taken by police on the submission of evidence of potential hunt related offences.

3.5 Problem Solving

Incidents, intelligence, crimes and investigations relating to hunt events are now recorded on the Athena system and have an Op Ordino tag has recently been added to assist searching and identification of all reports and police action.

For every OP Ordino deployment in 2024/25 hunt season WP have kept record of each op order and feedback sheet. These had been stored on an RCT folder by the coordinator but the tactical lead had requested the creation of the Problem Management Plan (PMP) on Athena where all of this information can be collated and used to support review and focus problem solving. This was described as a work-in-progress as the RCT were not familiar with the use of PMP and that there was need to provide an input to RCT members. The intention is that the PMP will include a running log where entries are timed and dated chronologically and decisions / rationale relating to police action are recorded in once place.

The tactical lead had discussed the prospect of opening a Problem Solving Plan (PSP) with colleagues from the WP Prevent Hub. The PSP is a more comprehensive process than the use of PMP and the benefits would likely include analytical support to understand more the problem, support of problem solving officers, recognition as a local policing priority, and potential partnership working with key stakeholders such as local authorities. The adoption of a hunt associated events PSP had not taken place and the reason for this is understood to be that there hasn't been significant recorded crime or ASB to justify.

The review team felt that the potential impact on trust and confidence in the event that WP does not deliver against the strategy and then current resource implications may well justify consideration of PSP. As outlined at 3.3.1, there have been a dozen deployments of up to 4 officers at a time over the 2024/25 hunt season.

The tactical lead was considering an approach to local authorities with regard to providing multi-agency advice for the holding of safe events for all.

Recommendation WP7 – It is recommended that a Problem Solving Plan is created to collate the entire policing response to this issue, given the impact on both resourcing and potential impact on public confidence.

3.6 Engagement

Throughout meetings with the strategic, tactical leads and those in the operational forum there was a broad consensus that, following significant public interest and police activity that it felt that this was an opportunity to continue to build relations with key stakeholders, clearly define expectations including what can be expected from WP, and define business as usual for the future.

The Hunt representatives described monthly meetings with both Chief Inspector and Sergeant from the RCT and were content with this arrangement. WH had attempted to give advance notification of planned hunt events although expressed the view that there were occasions where this was not always possible such as change in farmer crop management plans and the weather.

The representatives that are opposed to hunting described having met with the Chief Inspector and RCT Sergeant once but that they would welcome more regular meetings. They described that there were several people opposed to hunting in Warwickshire that had lost confidence in WP due to concerns over inactivity / lack of updates following the submission of evidence of alleged offences. Representatives described the inclusion of the guidance document on the WP website as a barrier to a working relationship with WP for the reasons outlined in section 3.2. Those describing themselves as hunt monitors are not always protestors.

Following a suggestion from NWCUC that 3rd party facilitation could be considered, a further email was received updating that this could be a viable option to attempt to reinstate confidence.

Members of the RCT describe having previous professional relationships with key individuals both from WH and those with opposing hunt activity.

The review team understood why meetings had occurred with a Chief Inspector in light of the level of public interest and intention to protect / build professional relationships with key stakeholders. It was felt that there may now be an opportunity to set routine meetings between key individuals / groups with RCT officers and Sergeant.

Recommendation WP8 – To consider a communication strategy that sets out engagement with identified key stakeholders and the Rural Crime Team and build upon efforts to outline clear expectations including what can be expected from Warwickshire Police.

Recommendation WP9 – To consider opportunities to build confidence with all key stakeholder groups and specifically to offer third party facilitation between Warwickshire Police and those that have chosen to disengage.

3.6 Training and Hunt Legislation Expertise

The tactical lead mentioned that with a turnover of staff the two officers that were most knowledgeable on trail-hunting and associated legislation had moved and that presently he considered all 8 RCT officers to have similar levels of knowledge.

NWCU outlined that there is a network of Hunt SPOCs around the country but generally these numbered 1-2 officers in each force area. There is access to training materials which is being refreshed and will be available from May 2025 and CPD events made available throughout the year.

The review team felt it was likely to be more manageable to select 1-2 SPOCs and to then consider development plans in conjunction with colleagues at NWCU.

WP currently provide a 90 minute input to all student officers regarding rural crime with part of that input focussed on hunting. A highly experienced and skilled officer working in learning and development has been tasked with reviewing this content, this work is well underway with a trial input having been delivered.'

NWCU advised that 'Doodle-Pic' type interactive on-line training products will be available from May 2025 and it would be possible for WP to provide this to officers.

The review team felt that in general there was a good awareness of Op Ordino, what the RCT offered and that the level of training provided to officers was proportionate. As outlined in recommendation WP4, the team felt that the policing response would likely benefit from the use of cue cards to remind officers of key immediate actions particularly in relation to responding spontaneous calls for service relating to hunting.

Recommendation WP10 – To consider the selection and appointment of 1-2 Hunt SPOCs from the Rural Crime Unit and the provision of development plans in conjunction with the National Wildlife Crime Unit

Recommendation WP11 – To consider use of National Wildlife Crime Unit training materials and target officers most likely to be deployed to hunt related incidents and relevant Command and Control Room staff.

4 Summary of Recommendations

4.1 Recommendations

- 4.1.1 The review team proposed consideration of the following recommendations for WP:

Recommendation WP1 – Review of Force Strategy regarding Policing of Hunt related Activities and specifically the use of the term ‘facilitate’.

Recommendation WP2 – consider revision or withdrawal of the current guidance on lawful trail hunting and lawful protest activities, in the context of revised Force position statement providing an opportunity to clarify WP's intentions.

Recommendation WP3 – To review the Op Ordino tactical plan and associated operational orders in-line with the national decision-making model and consider greater direction of expected action for officers deployed.

Recommendation WP4 – To consider the future level of officer deployment to Hunt events following an assessment of threat and risk.

Recommendation WP5 – To consider producing immediate actions to be available to officers deployed and contact and control staff managing both spontaneous calls for service and planned events.

Recommendation WP6 – To consider consolidating existing Warwickshire Police guidance and that provided by APP, to produce a process map and explanation of actions to be taken by police on the submission of evidence of potential hunt related offences.

Recommendation WP7 – It is recommended that a Problem Solving Plan is created to collate the entire policing response to this issue, given the impact on both resourcing and potential impact on public confidence.

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