

NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 10 JUNE 2010

HUNTING POLICY FOR SUSSEX POLICE

REPORT BY CHIEF CONSTABLE

Introduction

- 1.1 The force has published its own guidance on the Hunting Act 2004 but there has never been a policy to cover the issues that cross over hunting, wildlife protection and public order.
- 1.2 All three of these issues put together make for a volatile and emotive mix. This is particularly relevant to the five "Fox Hunts" that take place across rural Sussex, albeit one of these is kenneled in Surrey (the Old Surrey and Burstow and West Kent Hunt, based in Felbridge, Surrey).
- 1.3 Since the enactment of the Hunting Act 2004 public order incidents at hunts have been at a significantly reduced level. This is mainly due to the fact that there is a relative "status quo" between hunt monitors and stewards while the hunts are designed as drag hunts (hunts taking place involving no pursuance of live quarry).
- 1.4 Hunt monitors still regularly attend drag hunts to ensure that the Hunting Act is adhered to. This still leads to confrontation for a number of reasons; not least because the view of hunts and monitors that trespassing and illegal recording takes place by each party. Hunt monitors believe that stewards deliberately intimidate monitors and continue to commit offences under the Hunting Act along with committing other wildlife offences.

2009/2010 Hunt Season

- 2.1 During the past season there has been considerable correspondence from the Countryside Alliance and the League Against Cruel Sports to all police forces. This revolves around counter allegations from both parties concerning the definition of covert observation and when a Regulatory Investigative Powers Act (RIPA) authority is required.
- 2.2 There is a risk that both sides of the argument could cloud the issue of evidence gathering. However, any evidence submitted to police should be considered as to its legality of capture and what offences may be shown.
- 2.3 At the conclusion of the drag hunting season only one of the five hunts had proved somewhat difficult to maintain relationships with, despite the very best efforts of the District Commander. This was specifically due to the evidence gathering conducted by hunt monitors and the tension created with the hunt.
- 2.4 During the month of May there are planned meetings between both sides of this issue, namely members from the Crawley and Horsham hunt and

respective hunt monitors. A meeting with Authority members has also taken place and is reflected in the recommendations.

Wildlife / Hunting Act Offences

- 3.1 Clearly the Hunting Act 2004 caters for particular offences against British mammals. During the 2009/10 season two allegations have been made by monitors against hunts for interfering with badger sets.
- 3.2 Both allegations have been investigated with the forensic assistance of Natural England. Both have been resolved with no further action with words of advice being given due to the close proximity of the badger setts.
- 3.3 These investigations have caused tensions between the respective hunts and the Force. That said, if allegations are made of offences being committed the Force has a duty to investigate such matters without fear or favour.

Political Position

4. The political position with regard to the new government is not yet clear.

Governance of Hunting by the Force

5. At the current time Operations Department has ownership of this issue in the Force.

Consultation

6. From initial dialogue with hunt monitors, problems were caused last season mainly due to the Crawley and Horsham Hunt continuing to use stewards who are likely to intimidate the monitors. A meeting with the Masters of the Crawley and Horsham Hunt has also taken place which was viewed as positive. The hunt are making efforts to brief hunt stewards about their conduct and have withdrawn the use of terrier men completely. Dialogue between the groups will continue.

Conclusion

7. On-going dialogue between the hunts and hunt monitors is essential if the peace is to be maintained. Therefore each District with a hunt should have a nominated liaison officer to maintain relations and dialogue with the hunts. Once the political make-up of a new Government is known and views on hunting are known then a further review of hunting and associated policy should be conducted. The Authority have received briefings regarding the current position of hunting via this Scrutiny Committee and have thanked the Chief Constable for the resources which have been allocated to dealing with the area of policing.

Recommended – That

- (1) The Force adopted policy 1066/draft as policy with associated appendices from ACPO and the Force, once the consultation process and any amendments are duly made;

- (2) hunting as a single issue is owned by the Neighbourhood Policing Board as opposed to Keeping People Safe Board; and
- (3) a six monthly report on wildlife crime and associated issues is submitted to this committee from the Chief Constable

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