

Report: Independent Review into Policing of Hunting-Related Activities in Warwickshire

Prepared for: Police and Crime Panel – 20 January 2025

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1. Introduction

This report has been prepared for the Police and Crime Panel meeting scheduled for 20 January 2025, in respect of the item relating to the independent review into policing of hunting related activities in Warwickshire.

The independent review was commissioned by PCC Philip Secombe in response to public and stakeholder concerns regarding Warwickshire Police's handling of road safety concerns surrounding the activities of the Warwickshire Hunt. The review can be found at [Appendix A](#).

2. About the review

The OPCC prepared terms of reference for the review, which have been previously shared with the Panel. The review was conducted independently by David Peet, an experienced chief executive and organisational leader, who has over 16 years of police governance experience. Mr Peet was given no direction by the Police and Crime Commissioner as to how the review should be conducted, what documentation was looked at or who was spoken to during the review.

The review provides an in-depth analysis of decisions made by Warwickshire Police, including the issuing of a Community Protection Notice (CPN), subsequent legal challenges, and the communication and engagement strategy with the public and stakeholders.

Author's Comments

David Peet, author of the report, said: "The issue of hunting is highly divisive and elicits strong opinions on both sides. The review has not been commissioned to look at the current legislation on hunting, nor does it deal with arguments either for or against hunting. It aims to look specifically at Warwickshire Police's use of a Community Protection Notice to tackle reported incidents of anti-social behaviour by the Warwickshire Hunt, how matters were handled when the CPN was challenged and the decision-making that lay behind this.

"I have been able to identify both good practice and areas for improvement. While there were clearly shortcomings, particularly around oversight and communication, it is evident that the

force has taken steps to learn from these experiences and has implemented measures to address the issues identified.

“Importantly, there is no evidence to suggest undue influence from the Police and Crime Commissioner in operational matters, and I am satisfied that operational independence was maintained throughout. The use of a CPN was clearly focused on addressing anti-social behaviour relating to the use of public roads and not for allegations of illegal fox hunting. Nevertheless, the subsequent work by the force to provide greater clarity on how it polices the wider issue of trail hunting is welcome and, while it is early days, this feels like a step change in the way in which these issues are handled.”

3. Key Findings of the Review

The review highlights several areas where Warwickshire Police performed well, alongside areas where improvements are needed. Key findings include:

- **Community Protection Notice (CPN):** The CPN was issued in response to anti-social behaviour related to the use of roads during trail hunting activities, not in relation to illegal hunting under the Hunting Act 2004. The CPN aimed to address public safety concerns arising from road obstructions and other traffic-related issues.
- **Legal settlement and confidentiality:** Following an appeal against the CPN, both parties were tasked by the courts to narrow the issues in the case and/or seek a legal settlement. The confidentiality of the settlement agreement was subsequently upheld by the Information Commissioner’s Office under Section 32(1)(b) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- **Public communication:** The force underestimated the level of public and media interest in the issue and relied on a reactive rather than proactive communication strategy. The review recommends a more proactive and transparent approach moving forward, including providing clear information on how to report incidents relating to hunting and associated anti-social behaviour.
- **Operational independence:** The review found no evidence to suggest that the PCC’s membership of the Countryside Alliance influenced police decision-making. Clear operational independence was maintained throughout, with all decisions made by Warwickshire Police personnel at an appropriate level.
- **Community engagement:** A new operational strategy has been introduced to improve police responses to hunting-related concerns, enhance resource planning, and strengthen public confidence.

Commissioner’s Response

Warwickshire Police and Crime Commissioner Philip Secombe said:

“I commissioned this independent review to ensure full transparency, robust scrutiny, and a clear understanding of how Warwickshire Police approached what was a complex and divisive issue. I am pleased that the review has confirmed my office’s operational independence and found no evidence of inappropriate influence.

“It is also important to clarify that the Community Protection Notice was never about addressing illegal fox hunting, but instead focused on anti-social behaviour linked to road use during hunting activities. Public safety was always at the heart of the decisions taken by the force.

“The review provides clarity around the legal settlement agreement. The decision to pursue this approach was made under clear instruction from the court to explore settlement options, and Warwickshire Police acted on legal advice in maintaining its confidentiality. This position has been upheld by the Information Commissioner’s Office. Nevertheless, more could have been done to explain that position to the public at the time, which the force acknowledges. It has since published clear public guidance on its expectations of all parties involved with trail hunting.

“While improvements have been already been made, the review has helpfully outlined additional steps which both the force and my office can take to further enhance transparency and operational effectiveness. I am fully committed to ensuring the recommendations of this review are acted upon. Through my holding to account activity I will ensure that the lessons the review has uncovered are embedded across the force.”

4. Commitment to Action

The review sets out a series of recommendations aimed at improving oversight, public communications, internal processes, and community engagement. The Commissioner will ensure these recommendations are closely monitored through the OPCC Governance and Scrutiny Board to provide ongoing assurance to the public and report back to the Panel in due course.

The report has been published in full on the Police and Crime Commissioner’s website at www.warwickshire-pcc.gov.uk.