



Rural Crime Team Principles

Background

Wiltshire is a rural County and it is important that the many rural communities are policed appropriately, proportionately and fairly. To achieve this style of policing Wiltshire Police have created a rural crime team. This is a small team consisting of a Sgt and six PCs who sit outside the traditional Community policing model to specifically work with the rural community.

This team have a significant reach across Wiltshire and are seen as the experts in rural criminality. The relationships the team have with the community are key in maintaining trust and confidence across the rural areas of Wiltshire and it is vital that they can maintain this position.

Unlike other areas of policing, where criminality is relatively straight forward and the policing of potential issues has the full support of the communities, there are areas of rural crime which are much more polarising. These are often areas that have significant emotional attachment for both sides of the argument.

The one clear example of this is Hunting. Hunting with dogs is a very emotive subject with laws which are not easy to police. It is, therefore, exceptionally important, and an operational requirement, that the policing of hunt activity is not only done in an impartial manner without fear or favour, but that it is seen to be done in such a way.

There are several Wiltshire Police officers both serving and retired who have links to various Hunts across the County. There is the potential for this to call into question the perceived impartiality of the officers and could undermine the wider organisation. This is not a comment on whether the officer is or is not impartial in their actions, but rather, the perception that they cannot be impartial.

This lack of impartiality, whether real or perceived, in such a politically charged environment, undermines the mission for Wiltshire Police to improve public confidence.

Therefore, it is important that working principles are in place to ensure the open and transparent running of the unit and recruitment onto the unit. These principles, listed below, will be applied across the unit both in its current form and in future postings.

Principles:

- 1) **Officers will not have any personal links past or present to any hunts.** This will include historic links that have occurred during their employment with Wiltshire Police. Where the links were prior to the officer joining Wiltshire Police, a review will be undertaken by the senior lead on the rural crime team in consultation with the Professional Standards Department. These links are wider than just membership of a hunt, but also includes individuals who have ridden with the Hunts, or demonstrated public support in any other way.
- 2) **Officers will have no personal links past or present to Anti Hunt groups.** Similarly, public links to anti-hunt organisations will also undermine the impartiality, perceived or otherwise, of the officer and their ability to police without fear or favour.
- 3) **Officers will disclose links to any other rural based hobby or initiative that could potentially call into question their policing impartiality.** Although hunting is currently a significant issue across the Country, this does not mean that other forms of rural based activities will not also become subject of scrutiny. It is, therefore, important that Officers disclose any involvement they have in any form of hobby or initiative that has links to the rural community. This will not necessarily preclude the officer from working on the rural crime team but will ensure that a thorough risk assessment can take place. It will also allow for the officer to be fully supported.
- 4) **Social Media.** It is recognised that the use of social media can have real benefits to policing particularly when working with a widespread community such as the rural communities of Wiltshire. Officers are encouraged to use work based social media. However, officers must be aware their personal views cannot be linked to the work of the rural crime team. Officers should be fully conversant with the Wiltshire Police Social Media Policy. They should endeavour to keep their personal use of social media separate from their professional roles.

The independence and impartiality of the rural crime team is fundamental, and it must be recognised that being a member of this team comes with increased scrutiny. Officers accepting a role on the rural crime team must recognise the potential that it has to impact on the community confidence in the Force and act accordingly to maintain the support of the community in local policing.

Policing by consent means that the police can exercise their powers with the support of the community. It is vital that this consent is maintained, and officers of the rural crime team are impartial at all times and are seen to be impartial at all times.

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These principles and its equality impact assessment were last reviewed in March 2023
The date for the next review of these principles and equality assessment is March 2024