

Humane animal dispatch scheme – using volunteers to respond to deer vehicle collisions

Using volunteers to support officers attending deer vehicle collisions or reports of injured deer.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Rural and wildlife crime Community engagement
Organisation	Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary
HMICFRS report	PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary
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Region	South West
Partners	Police Local authority Private sector Voluntary/not for profit organisation

Key details

Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	May 2022
Scale of initiative	National
Target group	Communities General public Workforce

Aim

The aim of the humane animal dispatch scheme is to:

- provide volunteers with the opportunity to develop new skills to deal with reports of injured or deceased deer
- use volunteers in the community to respond to reports of injured or deceased deer, enabling police resources to be allocated elsewhere
- recognise the legal responsibility, accountability and the importance of animal welfare under the Animal Welfare Act 2006

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the humane animal dispatch scheme are to:

- improve the policing response to reports of injured and distressed deer
- improve public safety around deer vehicle collisions
- improve animal welfare and meet the statutory obligations under the Animal Welfare Act 2006
- reduce the demand on police resources
- improve the public's awareness on deer vehicle collisions
- enhance the cost-saving benefits to policing by utilising community volunteers

Description

Hampshire is 80% rural and home to five species of wild deer: Red, Roe, Fallow, Sika and Muntjac. Within Hampshire, there are several motorways and A-roads which border many rural areas highly populated with wild deer. In recent years, there has been an increase in the population of deer which has heightened the risk to public safety and animal welfare. There has also been an increase in recorded incidents per year, from 300 to over 600, placing a significant demand on police resources.

In response, the Hampshire humane animal dispatch scheme was launched. The scheme initially operated as a local agreement with gamekeepers, deer stalkers and deer managers from communities to support the force with deer vehicle collisions. There were organisational and personal risks associated with the local agreement, which prompted a review and redevelopment of the scheme. The review conducted in 2022 focused on recruitment standards and training, risk mitigation, and operational safety of the humane animal dispatch volunteers and the public.

49 humane animal dispatch volunteers have been integrated into the force as police support volunteers. They operate in urban and rural environments and are deployed via the call out system through the police control room.

Recruitment process

A volunteer role profile was created by the humane animal dispatch scheme coordinator which contains the following requirements to be held by the volunteer:

- deer management qualification
- humane animal dispatch certificate

- firearms certificate
- full UK driving license

The recruitment process included:

- Advertising the vacancy – the advert was processed through Citizens in Policing and was hosted internally and externally on the vacancy portal. All applications are reviewed by the Citizens in Policing coordinator and humane animal dispatch coordinator.

- Interview – shortlisted applicants are invited to a face-to-face interview and are sent a role expectation document. Two sets of interview questions are posed to the applicant, and they are shown a video scenario of a deer vehicle collision and encouraged to share through their response and decision-making process. The interview process is an opportunity to gauge applicants experience in animal dispatch, firearms knowledge, professionalism and interactions.
- Vetting and firearms checks – Applicants successful at interview are required to gain Vetting clearance at non-police personnel vetting level one (NPPV 1). The firearms licencing department are also involved in the process to determine the suitability of the applicant.
- Police assessment day – successful applicants are required to attend a one-day assessment held at Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary Firearms headquarters. A cohort of 12-15 applicants receive a two-hour classroom theory covering:
 - national decision-making model
 - situational awareness
 - vehicle positioning at scenes including road safety
 - firearms handling
 - potential risk factors including physical, emotional and reputational
 - how to respond to a call out

Each candidate will undertake three practical scenarios assessed against the performance criteria and learning outcomes (Deer Management Qualification approved).

- Final stages – once Vetting clearance has been confirmed, the new cohort of humane animal dispatch volunteers are invited to a face-to-face introduction to the force.

Command structure

The humane animal dispatch manager is of inspector rank, and they oversee the daily running of the scheme. The force incident manager facilitates the deployment of the humane animal dispatch volunteers through the police control room upon report of a deer vehicle collision. The humane animal dispatch coordinator is responsible for all administrative tasks and acts as the first point of contact for the volunteers.

Advisors

Six humane animal dispatch advisors have been selected from the current cohort of volunteers. An advisor is seen as an expert with substantial experience in the field of deer stalking, deer management and injured deer dispatch. The advisors support the scheme by:

- assisting in the recruitment process
- assist in developing continuous professional development through online training
- supporting the force's rural crime taskforce at shows and events to promote deer welfare and the volunteer scheme

Dispatch call out

A deer related incident is reported into force control room through 999, 101 or online reporting. If known by the informant, a What3Words (W3W) location is requested by the call handler. The report is graded at a one or two (risk to the public / hazard on road network). "XDEER" is recorded on incident summary by the call handler, enabling the incident data to be collated. Officers are dispatched to the scene to identify the exact location of the deer, establish if deer is still alive, and request for deployment of a humane animal dispatch volunteer.

A humane animal dispatch mapping layer is overlaid onto the incident mapping screen by the force control room call handler. An operator identifies the closest volunteers to incident location and once they arrive, they instruct the officers as to what is required to undertake a safe dispatch. humane animal dispatchers are advised to debrief with officers prior to leaving the scene.

Post-deployment

Following a deployment, the volunteers must submit a feedback form through a QR code. The data collated from the feedback form assists with future deployment. The feedback form also highlights any concerns, learning or development that may require addressing. trauma risk management (TRiM) processes can be implemented to support managing welfare and wellbeing of volunteers. The coordinator is responsible for reviewing all deer incidents across the force.

Continuous professional development (CPD)

The force and British Animal Rescue and Trauma Care Association (BARTA) have provided online training to upskill volunteers and manage risk. Annual CPD sessions require volunteers to attend a face-to-face training day at the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary Firearms headquarters.

The training day content includes:

- urban, rural and deer vehicle collision video dispatch scenarios with question banks
- firearm handling and safety
- road safety inputs

Costs and resources

The humane animal dispatch volunteers are covered by the force's Public Liability Insurance which covers costs of up to £350,000. The cover is only applicable whilst the volunteers are operationally active. For cover to be in place the conditions of the insurance are:

- a risk assessment needs to be enforced
- appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is worn
- volunteers are registered with any relevant associations
- firearms are registered and used lawfully

PPE consisting of a high-visibility jacket, vehicle LED light bars, and safety glasses are provided to all volunteers.

All volunteers also supplied with three lots of foam ear plugs and a box of and box of surgical gloves. The scheme is funded by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary and the charity the British Deer Society.

Evaluation

Since January 2023, the scheme has been evaluated by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary. The internal evaluation looks at:

- the number of reported deer incidents into Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary
- the number of humane animal dispatch volunteer deployments to reported incidents
- the number of armed response vehicle deployments to reported incidents

The data has enabled calculations to be made for cost saving benefits by using volunteers instead of authorised firearms officers.

During 2023, a total of 447 deer related incidents were reported to Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary. There were 114 humane animal dispatch deployments and 43 armed response vehicle deployments. The total cost saving was £42,932.40.

During 2024, a total of 643 deer related incidents were reported to Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary. There were 174 humane animal dispatch deployments and 29 armed response vehicle deployments. The total cost saving was £65,528.40.

Overall impact

Overall impact and wider roll out

- improved response – Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary are now able to meet the demand of deer vehicle collisions, fulfilling its statutory obligations under the Animal Welfare Act 2006
- enhanced effectiveness – by deploying humane animal dispatch volunteers, this has improved the effectiveness of the force's response to deer vehicle collisions
- best practice recognition – the scheme is supported by leading UK animal welfare and deer industry organisations
- community recognition – the scheme has received positive recognition from the community, helping to build public trust and confidence in policing
- force roll out – the scheme has now been launched across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and is recognised as a trusted operational tactic
- national roll out – the scheme is in the process of being adopted in Thames Valley Police and other forces are in advanced talks to implement a similar initiative

Feedback from officers, staff, and service users

- ongoing review – feedback is actively monitored and reviewed as part of the scheme's performance data
- continuous improvement – learning from feedback is incorporated into volunteer CPD training
- positive recognition – positive feedback has been received and shared with relevant volunteers and officers

Learning

What went well

- Effective collaboration – the partnership with the British Deer Society and other animal welfare stakeholders has been essential to the success of the initiative.
- Community engagement – there has been significant uptake when recruiting volunteers, with many providing a valuable and diverse skill sets.
- Support from citizens in policing – the citizens in policing programme support the expansion of volunteer roles. The initiative supports increasing demand for police services and demonstrating the value of integrating volunteers into operational policing.
- Structured training and assessment – the introduction of mandatory Deer Management and Humane Animal Dispatch qualifications and the practical assessment has ensured that all volunteers are competent and confident to do the role. CPD training for volunteers is a necessity to maintain, develop, and gain recognition for their skills.
- Operational efficiency and cost savings – the scheme has proven highly effective in reducing police demand following deer-related incidents. Once operational, the cost savings for the force have been significant, with initial outlay costs quickly offset by reduced demand on police resources.

Challenges

- Funding constraints – securing external funding for the scheme has been a persistent challenge for the force. While the British Deer Society provides support for PPE and continues to assist financially, sustainable funding streams remain a key area for development.
- Implementing the scheme – the process from volunteer recruitment to full operational readiness can take three to six months. The scheme requires careful planning and resource allocation.
- Training demands – it is essential to provide comprehensive training and assessment. Developing a training package can be resource-intensive and may slow down the on boarding of new volunteers.

Recommendations

- Engage with partners at the earliest opportunity – build strong relationships with relevant industry and welfare stakeholders from the outset. Their support and expertise are invaluable for both

implementation and ongoing operations.

- Invest in volunteer training – ensure all volunteers receive thorough, standardised training and assessment. This not only guarantees competence but also builds volunteer confidence and public trust.
- Plan for funding – identify and secure funding sources at the earliest opportunity. It is essential to explore partnerships with charities or industry bodies. It is also important to consider the long-term sustainability of the scheme when planning budgets.
- Knowledge sharing – Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary offer comprehensive documentation and support to other forces interested in adopting the scheme.

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