

## Cheshire Police and Crime Panel

### Questions submitted to the Commissioner in advance of the meeting of the Panel on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2025

- (i) It is now 20 years since the Hunting Act 2004 came into force. This prohibits the hunting of wild mammals with dogs, with some limited exemptions, such as drag hunting. Wildlife organisations, which observe hunt activity, have acknowledged the perseverance of Cheshire Police in pursuing prosecutions for illegal activity and responding to concerns expressed by landowners, livestock owners and the public; there has been an increasingly constructive partnership of police with such organisations to ensure the enforcement of the law. As part of this partnership how could the following be addressed:
1. The increased use of technology, particularly in detecting and prosecuting the practice of 'cub hunting', for which September is a significant month.
  2. The opening of more effective communication channels for wildlife organisations, the public and landowners to engage with the police and to be able to report potential offences immediately in a safer, faster and more effective way. It has been suggested that this could be done by a return to a designated police liaison officer to work with all parties and by assigning a designated WhatsApp channel which is under full observation by the liaison officer during hunt activity.
  3. A 'hunt activity notice' to be issued and publicised in an area where hunt activity is likely to take place. This would allow farmers, landowners and the public to be aware that a hunt was taking place near them and give them time to prepare for any potential consequences that may flow from this

Does the Commissioner agree that these measures would be entirely in keeping with his policing priorities expressed in the Cheshire Police and Crime Plan 2025:

**Reduce Crime / Listen to the public / Modernise** and would align with his overall objective of improving public confidence in policing?

- (ii) The Cheshire Police and Crime Plan 2024-28 states that the Commissioner will “embrace technology and innovation to ensure the service is well-equipped to deal with current and emerging threats, will drive efficiencies and investigative capacity by using technology such as AI and data analytics and will exploit innovative new ways of working to maximise intelligence led policing....”

Does this objective to utilise the most effective systems for modernisation and towards the use of effective AI and intelligence systems include the use of Live Facial Recognition (LFR)? If so, would the Commissioner please comment on the following issues:

1. Under what circumstances is LFR used?
2. How will the public be alerted to its use in public spaces, such as sporting events and lawful protests?
3. How does Retrospective Facial Recognition (RFR) work and under what circumstances is this used?
4. Does Cheshire Police use Operator-Initiated Facial Recognition?
5. Will Cheshire Police seek to use the newest system, currently being developed, Strategic Facial Matcher which is capable of searching a range of databases including custody records and immigration records and the passport database?
6. Will Cheshire Police seek to expand such technology to use fixed infrastructure facial recognition cameras or roving vans, as had started in some UK police forces?
7. In 2012, the High Court ruled that keeping the images of people who faced no further action or who were acquitted after charge was unlawful. How many images are on Cheshire Police’s database? Does Cheshire Police database contain the images of such individuals and can a person request their data or the right to have their personal data deleted if it is held in this way?

8. There are currently no specific laws or regulation covering the use of facial recognition technology, little legislation on the use of biometrics and police forces only have to have regard to compliance with data protection, human rights and discrimination law. What safeguards does Cheshire Police have for its use of such technology, particularly as concerns have been raised across the UK about the technology's accuracy in scanning the faces of people of colour and the potential for discrimination; such concerns have crystallised in the case of Shaun Thompson, who was wrongly identified by LFR and whose Judicial Review will be heard in January 2026.

- (iii) The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 makes it a criminal offence to pursue a course of conduct which amounts to harassment of another person, where someone knows or ought to know, that the act amounts to harassment. The Cheshire Police and Crime Panel has expressed great concern about harassment of elected officials in the past and at previous meetings, councillors from across the county have spoken of their own distress and that of colleagues.

The Commissioner's support for the borough's elected representatives who have faced harassment has been much appreciated. This is particularly so in his support for the Cheshire East **Task and Finish Group: Harassment, Intimidation and Abuse of Councillors**, as well as his endorsement of the recommendations of the task and finish group's final report. In the words of the group's Chair, "this is not about silencing free speech. It is about protecting democracy. If we allow abuse and intimidation to go unchecked, we risk a future where no-one is willing to stand for public office". The group's survey of Cheshire East councillors found that female respondents were more likely to feel at risk when fulfilling their roles as councillors either frequently or occasionally (41% female -v- 4% male).

In 2018 the College of Policing's guidance recommended that police forces stop using Police Information Notices (PIN) which had been used to warn individuals who had been the subject of a complaint of at least two incidents of alleged harassment that if it continued, formal police action may follow including a criminal charge. Nevertheless, Staffordshire Police has continued a similar system in which an Early Harassment Notice can be issued in specific circumstances. Further guidance on this is expected from the College of Policing in due course.

As the Commissioner's priorities include a focus on the prevention agenda as well as a keen focus on the scourge of violence against women and girls, and his welcome support for elected representatives, what are his comments on the current Staffordshire Police policy to support complainants and to underline the intentions of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997? Could such a system serve these purposes in Cheshire?