

THE HUNTING OFFICE

The Executive arm of the Governing Bodies for Hunting with Hounds in the UK

Report to MFHA and AMHB Committees April 2020

This report has been produced by the new team of joint Directors at the Hunting Office and serves to communicate our current work as well as our approach to the governance and guidance for hunts and hunting. Our main themes will remain standards, sustainability and communication – we will continue to uphold the highest standards within kennels and hunting, and communicate our advice and guidance efficiently and effectively.

The Hunting Office is responsible for governance and setting and maintaining high standards of conduct in the activity of hunting with hounds.

The Hunting Office team will be responsible for

- a) communicating the standards expected by the governing bodies
- b) assisting hunts achieve and sustain those standards by providing guidance, support and supervision
- c) reacting effectively when standards are not maintained to advise and assist in the implementation of changes to ensure resolution.

It is important that we firstly communicate the standards and conduct that are expected of hunts effectively and clearly, at the same time as re affirming the position of the Hunting Associations and role of the Hunting Office and what services it provides for member hunts.

Through the current programme of routine Kennel Inspections, as well as a number of documents explaining conduct, procedures and requirements, hunts will have a clear idea of what is expected of them as well as areas that require improvement.

We will continue to provide a structured clear platform for guidance and support to assist hunts with day to day running as well as in specific areas of concern. Our mantra will continue to be “Nothing less than excellent is acceptable” and with this in mind, we will aim to continually assist and implement change where necessary to improve standards and the sustainability of them.

Governance Frameworks

The Association Rules are currently being reviewed so that they reflect the Hunting Associations and Hunting Office structure, the services we provide and the powers the associations have. There are also some changes and additions we would like to propose, including the addition of rules relating to the disciplinary procedure, drafting hounds and association membership; these will be forwarded for committee approval.

We are producing clear communications for hunts not only describing the structure, authority and role of the Hunting Office and the services it provides, but also describing the standards we expect and where, within the governance frameworks, these standards can be found. The “**Standards within Hunts and Hunting**” document clarifies what is expected from all hunts, and highlights where these standards can be found and referred to.

The Hunting Office will always aim to assist an implement change where necessary. Whilst recognising the emotive issues surrounding hunts and their supporters, especially during times of uncertainty, instability and difficulty, the Hunting Office will strive assist where necessary to find a suitable and sustainable resolution. The “**Guidance to Hunts considering a Joint Venture**” document aims to provide guidance to hunts who are re evaluating their structure, considering their viability and looking for a sustainable way to move forward.

Kennel Inspections

Mark has now completed the initial three year program of Kennel Inspections. The vast majority of kennels maintain standards of a suitably high level and where standards were slightly lower, it was often due to lack of knowledge, or staffing levels and finance. On the whole, records and paperwork are the most frequent issue that needed addressing. However, this is addressed quickly and effectively by using the up to date Hunting Office templates which are accessed through the website.

- a. Staff numbers – staffing levels are a current cause for concern, with more packs finding it difficult to find suitably qualified staff for the positions available. This is an ongoing issue and, more often than not, has lack of finances as the root of the problem. The solution may be to increase / encourage joint ventures and / or amalgamations.
- b. Some packs still carry too many hounds in kennels, however this is monitored and we will continue to work with hunts to reduce their numbers to a sensible level.
- c. Some Kennel buildings are aging and are (or soon will be) in need of repair requiring substantial funds from the hunt. Again, these issues are monitored and hunts advised as necessary on the most suitable and sustainable course of action.

AMHB Kennel Visits and Viability

Richard has used the three month handover period to carry out many AMHB Kennel Inspections, become familiar with the packs and their key personnel. He has had communications with keys players within the AMHB and it's member packs and is up to speed with any current pack issues or items that need addressing.

Working closely with Paul Jelley, they have dealt with some AMHB country issues and reallocation of country, as well as steering the development of some possible joint ventures.

Having carried out the majority of Kennel Visits, the main concerns which should be addressed are the aging demographic of AMHB packs and encouraging younger members and supporters. A deficiency in funding of some packs as well as the decreasing amount of country available are two additional areas of concern regarding viability of some AMHB packs.

Richard is in close communication with all AMHB packs and is assisting and advising where necessary especially with regards to finances during the Covid-19 crisis.

Training

The 2020 Training Programme had been established and due to commence in April. This included the standard Hunt Staff Courses such as Essential Hound Handling, Hound Husbandry, Kennel Management and Deadstock Handling, as well as some additional new courses this year: Countryman's Seminar, PR and Social Media Seminars, Whipper In Seminar and the Veterinary Symposium. We are hoping that we can reschedule some of the courses for later in the year, or run some of them online.

The Kennel Management Assessments (KMA) continue this year, having already completed 10 of 14 due to be done in 2020. The KMA aims to make sure candidates are of a suitable standard to be in a position of responsibility in kennels. Those that are not quite up to the required standard are mentored and given guidance by the Hunting Office (Patrick Martin). Over time the aim is that all staff will be required to pass the KMA prior to moving to positions of responsibility in kennels. Currently Mark Hankinson, Patrick Martin and Richard Tyacke form the team of assessors. Wayne O'Brien is shadowing Patrick with a view to doing some of the Beagle KMA.

The Hunting Office Apprenticeship will now be a two year program to fit in with training and assessment needs, as well as with the hunting calendar as much as possible. Information has been circulated to all hunts and Mark is currently working on 2020 placement allocation.

General Administration

Employment Templates - The Hunting Office has sought advice from rradar and all the Employment Templates, Policies and Guidance have been updated (to include changes coming into force in April 2020) and circulated to all hunts. The Hunting Office continues to encourage all hunts to make use of the rradar Legal Helpline (included in the Legal Fees insurance) as a valuable resource for employment (and other legal) guidance.

Hunting Office (and Hunting Associations) Website – The Hunting Office is planning an overhaul of the website to continue to improve communications to the wider public about the operations of the Hunting Associations and the Hunting Office. It will retain its current functionality (Members section including documents, templates and advice for hunt officials), but the overall look and public pages will be updated.

Secretaries of Foxhounds Association

Since the inclusion of the Secretaries at the MFHA AGM, the SFHA would like the MFHA to consider taking them under the MFHA umbrella. Mark is continuing discussions with SFHA, considering their Rules and Constitution and will form a proposal for the MFHA Committee to consider.

April 2020