

Independent Dog Welfare Visitors Scheme



Annual Report 2019 – 2020

Foreword by David Lloyd, Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire

Our Independent Dog Welfare Visitors have continued throughout 2019- 2020 to provide essential and robust scrutiny of the care and treatment of police dogs, ensuring that procedures are ethical, humane and transparent in accordance with the Animal Welfare Act 2006. I am pleased that across Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire we have a scheme in place that gives the public confidence and reassurance that this important function is being carried out effectively.



The report highlights the findings from the five dog welfare visitors between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020. I am pleased that no serious concerns were raised by volunteers in the 29 visits that were completed during that time period, and that there has been an increase in the number of positive comments made. These have included the cleanliness of the cages, the condition of the dogs and the rapport between the dogs and their handlers.

While the dog welfare visits were initially paused at the end of March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I am pleased that visits have been adapted so that they can take place outdoors and in accordance with social distancing from early July.

I would like to thank our volunteers for their continued dedication and commitment to the scheme over this past year and look forward to the scheme continuing to develop and grow.

David Lloyd
Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner

Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire (BCH) Dog Unit



We continue to support the Dog Welfare Scheme and have worked in collaboration with the Dogs Trust earlier this year to support other forces that are yet to adopt a Dog Welfare Scheme with a template. The unit also received a certificate from the Dogs Trust certifying that we have a recognised and monitored animal welfare scheme which allows the unit to obtain suitable working dogs from the trust.

The new scent identification suite facilities have been very successful in supporting the training of dogs this year, following funding from the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner, David Lloyd. In particular, the inclusion of digital media training has vastly increased the opportunities for police to be able to gather evidential material that may support the prosecution of a case.

We would like to thank all of our volunteers for their care and watchful eye in terms of the welfare of our dogs and in particular one of our volunteers who has moved away from the area and can no longer conduct visits. We wish them every success in the future.

Sergeant Mike Wood
Hertfordshire Constabulary

Background of the scheme

The Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire (BCH) Independent Dog Welfare Visiting scheme was established in 2012 and has taken several forms since then. Animal Welfare Visiting Schemes came into existence following the death of a police dog in Essex during training in 1997, which led to a loss of public confidence. Following a review into the training and handling launched by the then Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Police Dog Sub-Committee, Animal Welfare Visiting Schemes came into existence.

A Visiting Scheme has been in place in Hertfordshire since 2006, and collaborated with Bedfordshire in 2009. Luton International Airport (LIA) became involved in the scheme in 2011¹. In 2012, the Independent Dog Welfare Visiting Scheme came under the responsibility of the Police and Crime Commissioner and shortly after, Cambridgeshire joined the scheme.

Overview of the Scheme

Dog Welfare Visitors are independent members of the public who observe, comment and report on the condition of the police dogs and their means of transportation whilst on duty. In order to maintain the scheme's independence and avoid any conflict of interest, all visitors have to ensure they do not have any direct involvement with Hertfordshire Constabulary including being a serving police or retired police officer, a member of police staff, Police Community Support Officer, Special Constable or Magistrate.

The visitors carry out an inspection on all police dogs within the Dog Unit which have a mix of General Purpose Police Dogs which are deployed for searching, tracking, arrest work and crowd control. A number of these dogs are trained to work with firearms officers. Both the Dog Unit and LIA Team have dogs who specialise in detecting drugs, cash, guns, weapons, and explosives.

The aim of the scheme is to inspect each police dog every three months and no longer than every six months. There are 53 dogs across BCH and 12 based at LIA. Due to the organisation of the Dog Unit these visits are based on a 10-week rotation. Should a police dog miss a scheduled visit they will be added to another upcoming scheduled visit if possible or a special visit is arranged in order to maintain regular inspections.

¹ Prior to 2011 the LIA unit had a single welfare visitor who liaised directly with the unit Chief Inspector. It was decided to bring the unit under the OPCC scheme when the Chief Inspector at the time retired. The visiting procedure is the same as for the BCH units with dogs visited every three months and reports are returned to the OPCC.

Recruitment of the Independent Dog Welfare Visitors

As of 1 April 2019, the joint Independent Dog Welfare Visiting Scheme had five active Dog Welfare Visitors covering Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. One visitor is from Bedfordshire, one from Cambridgeshire and three from Hertfordshire.

Independent Dog Welfare Visitors remain committed to the scheme with many volunteers having committed to the role for several years. Four have in excess of four years' service, with another having completed two years' service.

Newly appointed visitors are given full training with input from the Dogs Trust on topics such as training methods, animal welfare, transportation and health and safety before undertaking any visits and complete a six-month probation period to ensure they understand the monitoring arrangements and can carry out visits with confidence. Appointments are reviewed every three years in line with the renewal of Constabulary vetting which all appointees must undergo.

Visitors are volunteers and as such do not receive a salary, but are reimbursed for any expenses incurred in making a visit.

If you are interested in becoming an Independent Dog Welfare Visitor, please follow the link to learn more about the scheme and get in contact with the scheme administrators:

<http://www.hertscommissioner.org/dogs>

Visiting Procedure

PD Wills



Visits are arranged at an agreed police training location on any given date and time with the Dog Unit/LIA representative and the scheme administrators in the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner's Office. The visitor is informed of which dogs are available to be seen during each visit and provided access to the previous visits' comments by the scheme administrators. Visits take place primarily at the three Forces headquarters and at a facility at Luton Airport.

At the visits, the Dog Welfare Visitor will record all observations, comments and any concerns relating to welfare needs on a report form. The completed report form is counter signed by the handler who has an opportunity to record any further details before it is sent to the scheme administrator. The form complies with the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs 'Code of Practice' (2017) which monitors welfare against a number of categories (see Appendix 1 for more detail).

Reporting and Recording

All completed report forms are sent to the scheme administrators for monitoring. Should any concerns be raised by the visitors regarding the welfare of the police dogs, the scheme administrators will raise this with the Dog Unit

or LIA Team. Any action taken to resolve the concerns raised is recorded by the scheme managers. All information noted on the report form or gathered at the visits is confidential. In the period of this Annual Report no serious concerns were noted. However, feedback from the visitors has in the past shaped the early retirement of some dogs which shows that anything they raise is taken forward by the Constabulary.

Panel Meetings

As part of the scheme, the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner holds bi-annual Panel Meetings with volunteers and representatives from the BCH Dog Unit and LIA Team. This is an opportunity to keep the volunteers informed of any changes to legislation and updates within the Dog Units and for the unit to hear directly from the volunteers.

Annual Review

Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, Dog Welfare Visitors completed 29 visits, resulting in 162 dog checks across the three counties. Broadly Figure 1 shows that there was an even spread of visits across each county. On average, 2 visits are undertaken each month by the visitors. In comparison with the period 2018-19, 44 visits were completed and 214 dogs seen.

Figure 1. Number of visits per location by month

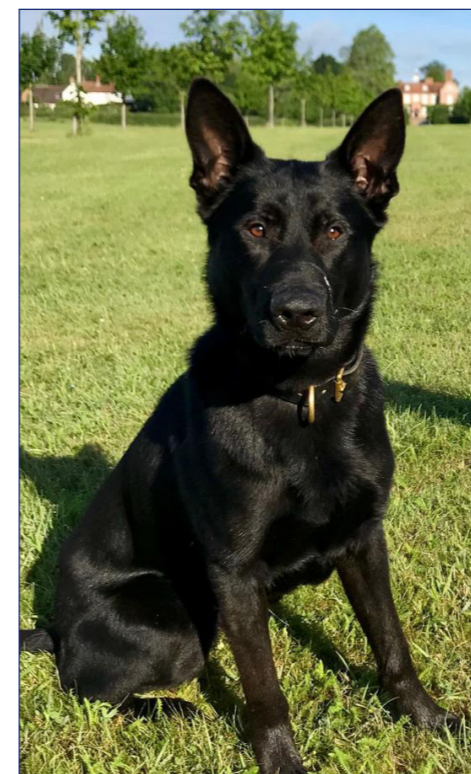
Visit Location	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Hertfordshire	1	2	0	2	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	10
Cambridgeshire	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	6
Bedfordshire	1	0	1	2	2	0	0	1	1	3	0	0	11
LIA	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Total	3	3	2	6	2	1	1	4	1	3	1	2	29

The reduction in number of visits carried out and number of dogs seen compared to 2018-19 can be attributed to a revision in the visiting process. There are five dog teams that undergo training every 10 weeks. Visits are set up to coincide with these training sessions meaning that each team is seen every 10 weeks and due to the way the rota is arranged there are visits every two weeks. Previously the visits were not occurring on such a regular schedule and some dogs slipped through the system requiring special visits. This new system will ensure dog teams are now seen within the specified three-month period.

Operational requirements within the tri-force area of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire prevents some police dogs and handlers being available at the time of visits. Any dog unable to be seen will try to be seen at another visit soon after the scheduled one. This more structured approach to the timing of visits has resulted in a consistent and regular visiting timetable with fewer dogs being seen too frequently, fewer not being seen for an extended period and fewer special visits being required hence the overall reduction in visits being undertaken.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, visitor activity was suspended during the last two weeks of March 2020 for the safety and welfare of visitors, dogs and their handlers. As such, there was a slight reduction in the number of visits at the end of the 2019/20 financial year.

Dog Welfare Findings



PD Bran

The volunteers monitor the condition of the police dogs and their means of transportation while on duty. No serious concerns were raised by the volunteers. A couple of dogs had shown signs of allergies, one of which was attributed to the cleaning products used in the kennels, this was promptly identified and addressed. Positive comments made regarding the cleanliness of the cages, availability of water and first aid kits.

The visitors often commented on the healthy weight of the police dogs, how well the dogs moved, the excellent condition of their coats and the good rapport the dogs have with their handlers. Those police dogs that had received medical treatment for injuries and were recovering were commented on by the visitors, but these were all for minor issues. Visitors recorded additional positive comments such as vaccinations and medication for dogs being kept up to date.

There have been no complaints received either within the Constabulary or the OPCC regarding the welfare of a particular dog during the reporting period. Complaints made directly to the Constabulary or OPCC will be handled according to the relevant complaint procedure. Should one of the independent visitors receive information or a complaint in confidence regarding the welfare of a particular dog this information should be forwarded immediately to the scheme administrator who will arrange for the matter to be investigated.

Updates

Sadly, during the year, on the advice of the vet and in consultation with senior constabulary officers, one dog was put to sleep due to biting the handler on more than one occasion (not PD Bran or Wills featured above). This was not an easy decision to take but was believed to be in the best interests of all.

On a more positive note a number of new dogs have been taken on this year as some older ones have retired and the visitors regularly commented on how well their training was progressing as well as their general health and are looking forward to seeing how they develop.

Appendix 1: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs 'Code of Practice' (2017) categorisations

a) Need for a suitable environment

- Provide dogs with safe, clean environments with adequate hazard protection.
- Provide dogs with a comfortable, clean, dry, quiet, draught-free rest area, somewhere to go when frightened and access to an appropriate toilet area, away from its rest area, to use as frequently as needed.
- Ensure that any place in which dogs are left is large enough to provide, at all times, a comfortable area with effective ventilation and temperature control, and that the dogs are able to move around to ensure comfort, avoiding becoming too hot or too cold.
- When transporting dogs, ensure they are comfortable and safe at all times.
- Do not leave dogs unattended in any situation, or for any period of time which is likely to cause them distress.

b) Need for a suitable diet

- Provide dogs with clean, fresh drinking water at all times, carrying it with you if it is unlikely to be available.
- Dogs should be able to reach food and water easily in all situations.
- Provide dogs with balanced diets that meet their individual requirements or special feeding needs, and ensure they maintain a stable, healthy weight.
- Be aware of any changes in the amount dogs eat or drink, as potential signs of ill health.
- Dogs should not be fed shortly before, or after, strenuous exercise.

c) Need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals

- Make sure that dogs have opportunities to socialise with people and friendly dogs, not being left alone long enough to become distressed.
- If dogs are fearful of, or aggressive towards, other dogs, or distressed or frightened by social encounters, avoid these situations and seek advice.

- Handle dogs properly, and ensure they are not stressed or endangered by other people or animals, or leave them unsupervised with animals or people who may harm or frighten them.
- Be consistent in the way you and those around you react to dogs.

d) Need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns

- Make sure that dogs have enough to do so they do not become distressed or bored through access to safe toys and suitable objects to play with and chew.
- Ensure dogs can rest undisturbed when they want to.
- Provide dogs with regular opportunities for exercise and play.
- Know the behaviour of dogs when they are fit and healthy. If you become aware of changes in behaviour, seek veterinary advice as the dog may be distressed, bored, ill or injured.
- Use positive reward-based training and avoid harsh, potentially painful or frightening training methods.

e) Need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

- Take precautions to keep dogs safe from injury, check them regularly and watch for signs of injury, disease or illness, or changes in behaviour.
- Check dogs' coats regularly, and groom dogs if necessary.
- If dogs are kept outside, clean up regularly to avoid disease transmission.
- It is important dogs are only given medicines authorised for dogs or that have been specifically prescribed or advised by your vet for a dog.
- Dogs are required to wear a collar and identity tag when in public. Collars should be of the correct size and fit, not causing any pain or discomfort.
- Microchip databases should be kept up to date with any changes in the contact details of a dog's registered keeper.