

Independent Dog Welfare Visitors Scheme Annual Report 2020 – 2021



Foreword by David Lloyd, Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire

Our Independent Dog Welfare Visitors adapted to the challenging circumstances of 2020/21, continuing 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.

Across Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, we continue to have an effective and transparent scheme in place that gives the public confidence and reassurance that police dogs are being well cared for.

Despite the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, six new dog welfare visitors were recruited and they carried out 31 visits between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, an increase on the 29 conducted in the previous year. This report highlights the findings by the six dog welfare visitors from those 31 visits and shows that no serious concerns were raised by volunteers during that review period.

As we reflect on what has been a unique and testing year, it would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to all those who give their time freely to supporting this important scrutiny function. This year more than ever, the dog welfare visitors have shown how invaluable they are. Without them we couldn't conduct the important scrutiny and assurance function we do.



A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'David Lloyd'. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

David Lloyd

Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner

Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire (BCH) Dog Unit



This will be my fourth year working with the OPCC and the independent dog welfare scheme and it has been an interesting one with the worldwide pandemic. Initially welfare visits were suspended at the beginning of the lockdown, however, I was keen to restart them with measures in place and to ensure all dogs were independently visited and I'm happy to say that after a lot of hard work by the volunteers we have managed to get the scheme back on track.

I am also happy to report that the majority of the older vehicles on the fleet have been replaced by new well-equipped Mondeos which provide optimum welfare provisions for our police dogs.

I'm also pleased to say that in this year we trained several more Drugs / Cash /Weapons dogs together with an extra Digital Media Dog. We have also trained two Victim Recovery dogs which is a new discipline for BCH.

Once again, I would like to show my appreciation to the volunteers and the OPCC team for continuing to maintain this vital scheme and the support and cooperation from our handlers which makes the scheme the very success that it is.

Sergeant Mike Wood

Hertfordshire Constabulary

Background to 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 undermined public confidence. Following a review into the training and handling launched by the 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 Constabulary joined the scheme.

Overview of the Scheme

Independent 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 no direct involvement with Hertfordshire Constabulary including being a serving 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 has 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 that 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.

Recruitment of the Independent Dog Welfare Visitors

As of 1 April 2020, 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 are from Hertfordshire.

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 3 months and reports are returned to the OPCC.

In order to provide more flexibility to the scheme and align representation across the three counties the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Hertfordshire undertook a recruitment campaign seeking interest from existing volunteers in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. Through this process one further person from Bedfordshire has been taken on, taking the current number of Dog Welfare Visitors to six.

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://hertscommissioner.org/dogs>

Visiting Procedure

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 OPCC. 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.



PD Leo

At the visits, the Dog Welfare Visitor 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. Feedback from the visitors has in the past informed decisions around the early retirement of some dogs which demonstrates that issues raised by the volunteers is taken seriously and acted upon 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. In order to comply with Covid-19 restrictions, these meetings were held virtually during 2020/21.

Adapting to the Covid-19 Pandemic

Covid-19 lockdown restrictions introduced in March 2020 meant that Dog Welfare visiting and group training days were temporarily suspended. In parallel, work was undertaken to adapt to the challenging and uncertain circumstances of the past year to continue delivering this important scrutiny function and maintain public confidence that the dogs continued to be well cared for. This included undertaking outdoor visits and minimising contact with the handlers. Visits restarted on this basis on 23 June 2020.

Between 23 June 2020 and 31 March 2021, Dog Welfare Visitors completed 31 visits, resulting in 211 dog checks across the three counties. Figure 1 shows that there was a broadly even spread of visits across each county. On average, two visits were undertaken each month by the visitors. Despite the ever-changing circumstances of the past year, the scheme exceeded the number of visits undertaken in 2019/20 (when 29 visits were completed and 162 dogs seen).

Figure 1. Number of visits per location by month

Visit Location	Apr	Ma	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	3	0	0	2	1	2	0	2	0	10
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	3	1	0	0	8
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	2	3	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	9
LIA	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	4
Total	0	0	2	5	4	3	4	1	6	1	2	3	31

This is an excellent achievement given the constraints of the pandemic and that visits were completed within a condensed timeframe given the number of dogs that were outside of the visiting schedule of three months.

There are five dog teams that undergo training every 10 weeks. Visits are normally set up to coincide with these training sessions meaning that each team is seen every 10 weeks with visits every two weeks.

Operational requirements occasionally prevent 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. The structured approach to the timing of visits that was adopted in the 2019/20 report has continued to result in the dogs being seen in a consistent and regular visiting timetable with fewer dogs not being seen for an extended period and fewer special visits being required.

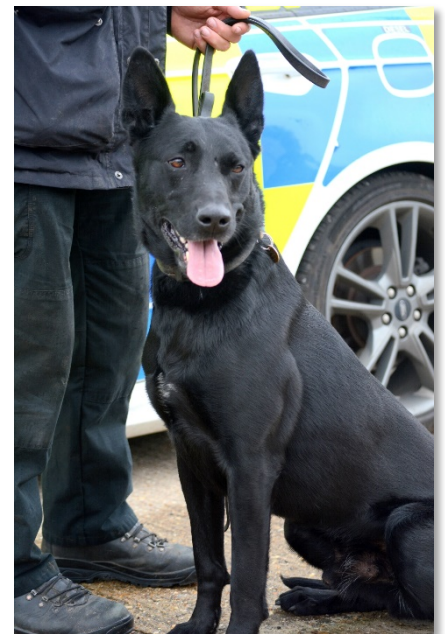
Dog Welfare Finding

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 from the visits. A couple of dogs have been on anti-tic medication, one required surgery for an obstruction but returned to full duties and a couple had minor paw injuries which were being treated and showed no long-term effects. Generally, many positive comments were made regarding the cleanliness of the cages, availability of water and first aid kits and the health and liveliness of the dogs.

Some of the visitors had the opportunity during their visits to see different police vehicles that were on loan for assessment by the handlers. The unit recently upgraded its vehicles to new and very well-equipped Ford Mondeos which provide excellent welfare conditions for the dogs and none of the others trialled offered facilities that were better than those already in use and there are no immediate plans to further replace any of the current fleet of vehicles.

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



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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

During the year, six dogs were retired or sold on to other forces for a variety of reasons, including their age or for medical reasons. Five new dogs have been taken on as replacements and are currently going through training. More have been through the Drugs/Cash/Weapons training, there is also an additional Digital Media dog and two Victim Recovery dogs have been trained providing a new discipline for the unit.

Sadly, during the year, one dog passed away due to a sudden health issue and on the advice of the vet and in consultation with senior Constabulary officers, two dogs were put to sleep. These are never easy decisions to make but they were taken in the best interests of all. On a more positive note the new dogs that have been taken on are progressing well and the visitors are following their development.

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.