

Independent Dog Welfare Visitors Scheme



Annual Report 2021 – 2022

Foreword by David Lloyd, Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire

Throughout 2021/22 our Independent Dog Welfare Visitors continued 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.

While other schemes continued to adapt as Covid guidance changed, visits being undertaken outdoors meant that the welfare scheme continued to operate as an effective and transparent scheme that gives the public across Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire confidence and reassurance that police dogs are being well cared for.

The report highlights that the year presented other challenges which unfortunately made it difficult to undertake the expected number of visits, so 14 visits were carried out between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, down on the previous year. I am however confident that this has been addressed and that the changes that to be introduced over the next year will take the scheme forward.



Once again I am pleased to report that this report highlights from the findings of the six dog welfare visitors that no serious concerns were raised during that review period.

As we reflect on what has continued to be 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. Once again the dog welfare visitors have shown how invaluable they are. Without them we could not conduct the important scrutiny and assurance function we do.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Lloyd".

David Lloyd

Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner

Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire (BCH) Dog Unit



I have recently taken on responsibility as the Dog Unit Inspector, taking over from Insp Andy Kirby who retired last year. The department has been through a period of change over the past 12 months, with a new Training Department installed improving our coordination and governance on dog training.

The Dog Training Centre allows us to run a number of courses in house, with a planned Initial Drugs / Cash / Weapons course in the coming weeks followed by an Initial Explosive Detection course in the Autumn. I

have aspirations that we are a regional centre of excellence for training, which our new and improved estates provisions should cater for.

A period of fleet modernisation has been completed, with us now looking forward to how we make the fleet more adaptable as we transition to a Volvo fleet.

I am aware we have been through a transitional phase for our volunteers and the OPCC team, so thank them for their patience as we re-launch the welfare visit scheme. I look forward to working closely with the team over the coming year.

Inspector James Lacey

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 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



PD Dexter

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 54 dogs across BCH and 13 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 3 months and reports are returned to the OPCC.

Recruitment of the Independent Dog Welfare Visitors

As of 1 April 2021, the joint Independent Dog Welfare Visiting Scheme had six active Dog Welfare Visitors covering Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. Two visitors are from Bedfordshire, one from Cambridgeshire and three from Hertfordshire.

Independent Dog Welfare Visitors remain committed to the scheme with many volunteers having been in the role for several years. Four have more than five 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: <https://www.hertscommissioner.org/getting-involved/how-to-get-involved/independent-dog-welfare-scheme>

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 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 though the variety of locations will be expanded over the next year.

The visiting procedure is currently under review with the aim to make it more flexible and to give the volunteers the opportunity to visit the dogs and see them in more varied environments and at different points in their training.

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. Feedback from the visitors has in the past informed decisions around the early retirement of some dogs which demonstrates 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.

To comply with Covid-19 restrictions, these meetings were held virtually during 2021/22.

Covid-19

Despite changes in government guidance over the year, visits have continued as they are outdoors with no contact with either dogs or handlers in order to maintain appropriate social distancing.

Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, Dog Welfare Visitors completed 14 visits, resulting in 100 dog checks across the three counties.

Accessibility issues during refurbishment works meant that Bedfordshire HQ was not used for dog training during 2021-22 so most visits were to Hertfordshire Police HQ. Additionally due to minimal numbers of people passing through Luton Airport the unit there was redeployed and only visited again when they were reinstated in September 2021.

With a changeover of staff within the Dog Unit at Hertfordshire during the year the training regime was reworked resulting in the time that visits could take place not being conducive to many of the volunteers being able to attend. This resulted in half the number of visits on the previous year taking place.

With the new Inspector of the unit coming into post towards the end of the year this issue is being addressed and a new visiting procedure will be published and implemented in the forthcoming year to “reboot” the scheme to make it more flexible and varied.

Dog Welfare Findings



PD Jaxx

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. There had been a couple of cases of kennel cough treated. One dog had eaten wood and needed it removing, one dislocated a shoulder but this was resolved and no further occurrence reported, one needed treatment for an eye infection and another for inflamed tonsils. All were treated quickly and effectively and there has been no long term effects of any of these reported issues.

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

During the year, five dogs were retired or sold on to other forces for a variety of reasons, including due to age, for medical reasons and not reaching the required training standard. They have all been replaced and efforts are on-going to expand the teams further. More dogs have also been through the Drugs/Cash/Weapons training, Digital Media dog and a further Victim Recovery dog has been trained to enhance that discipline for the unit.

Sadly during the year one dog passed away due to a sudden health issue.

As described above with a new Inspector now fully in post, a new visiting procedure being worked on and new dogs to monitor we look forward to reinvigorating over the next year, raising our standards of monitoring and maintaining public confidence that dogs within the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire force areas are well treated and cared for.

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.