

Joint Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire Independent Dog Welfare Visiting Scheme



Annual Report 2015 - 2016



Bedfordshire
Police & Crime
Commissioner



Cambridgeshire
Police & Crime
Commissioner

David Lloyd
Police and Crime
Commissioner
for Hertfordshire

Introduction

The Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire (BCH) Independent Dog Welfare Visiting scheme was established in December 2012 under the responsibility of the three Police and Crime Commissioners. Dog Welfare Visitors are independent members of the local community who make visits to check the welfare of police dogs who are on active service with the BCH Dog Unit. The Dog Welfare Visitors observe, comment and report on the condition of the dogs and how they are transported to provide an independent check on the welfare of dogs in police care.

Newly appointed visitors complete a six month probationary period and are required to attend training sessions before they are accredited to carry out visits.

Police dogs vary in breed and the work that they do. General Patrol (GP) dogs are deployed on searching, tracking, arrest work and crowd control. A number of these dogs are also trained to work with firearms officers. Other dogs are trained as pro-active drug dogs using their acute sense of smell to search for, or screen for; drugs, firearms, explosives or cash.

The unit complies with the RSPCA's 'Five Freedoms' on which the Animal Welfare Act 2006 is based.

The Independent Dog Welfare Visiting scheme is administered by the office of Hertfordshire's Police and Crime Commissioner on behalf of the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire.

Inspection Visits

As of 31 March 2015 the joint Independent Dog Welfare Visiting Scheme had four active Dog Welfare Visitors. One visitor is from Cambridge, one from Bedfordshire and two from Hertfordshire.

Visits are arranged to see dogs at a location and time on any given day at an agreed police training location. The visitor is advised by the Scheme Administrator which dogs are available to be seen during each visit.

The aim is to inspect each dog at least once in a six month period. When conducting a visit, the Dog Welfare Visitors are accompanied by a dog handler.

At each visit, visitors complete a visitor's report form to indicate observations and all records of

visits are logged. On the report form there is the opportunity for the visitor to enter comments and concerns.

At the end of each visit, the visitors report form is sent to the Scheme Administrator who will forward it to the Dog Unit if any concerns are raised. Any information noted on the reports or gathered during a visit is confidential.

Inspections are based on the RSPCA's 'Five Freedoms'. These are:

- Freedom from hunger and thirst
- Freedom from discomfort
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease
- Freedom to express normal behaviour
- Freedom from fear and distress

Panel Meetings

Panel meetings are held twice a year and are attended by visitors, the Scheme Administrator, and Dog Unit representatives. Issues arising from visits are discussed. Updates are given by the Dog Unit Sergeant or nominated officer, including information on when a dog has had major injury or surgery or if a dog has been retired. During 2015-2016 five dogs and two puppies have been re-homed.

Due to high recruitment of volunteers required for other schemes only one panel meeting took place in September 2015. At the September panel meeting, visitors received a refresher training session provided by the Dogs Trust.



Statistics and Feedback



Between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016, volunteers completed 38 visits and 122 dog checks.

Visitor Comments

Additional comments noted by visitors during the checks indicate that medication is up to date, worming has been completed recently, cages are clean and in good condition, water is available, dogs are active and lively, dog looks okay and moves well. Other comments note recovery following treatment and surgery.

Visitor Concerns

One concern was raised by visitors which related to air conditioning failure in the vehicle the dog was being transported in. Following investigation it was found the temperature recorder unit had been put in the wrong place and was moved and resolved.

Minor dog ailments were noted by visitors but all of these were under vet treatment and actively monitored by the handlers.

Comments from Police and Crime Commissioners

During March 2016 Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner David Lloyd and Olly Martins, PCC for Bedfordshire made the visit to meet with volunteers from the Independent Dog Welfare Scheme.

David Lloyd commented: "It is clear from our visit today there is clear and genuine love for our police dogs who play such a crucial role in supporting our officers. Their specialist skills increase our efficiency and effectiveness as a force and it is equally important to ensure the correct checks and measures are in place to support their welfare."

Olly Martins commented: "Police dogs provide vital capability to officers in searching for people, drugs and firearms, and they are a very popular policing asset. Nonetheless it is important to ensure everything is at it should be in terms of our animal welfare responsibilities, and the Independent Dog Welfare Scheme is a valuable way of providing just such a safeguard".

Thanks go to all four volunteers who dedicate their time to monitor and assess the welfare of dogs working across all three forces of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

Contacts

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For more information regarding the role of the Joint Dog Welfare Visiting Scheme and that of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire, please visit www.hertscommissioner.org