Joint Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire Independent Dog Welfare Visiting Scheme

Annual Report
2013 - 14
The Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire Independent Dog Welfare Visiting scheme was established in December 2012 under the responsibility of the three Police and Crime Commissioners. The collaboration of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Hertfordshire Police Dog Unit became operational in spring 2013. The Independent Dog Welfare Visiting scheme is administered by the office of Hertfordshire’s Police and Crime Commissioner on behalf of Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire.

Introduction

Dog Welfare Visitors are independent members of the local community who make visits to check the welfare of police dogs. 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. Training includes information about the scheme, how to carry out visits and an opportunity to see a police dog. The training is delivered in conjunction with the Dogs Trust as well as experienced volunteers. (The Dogs Trust is the largest dog welfare charity in the UK. They help us on a voluntary basis to make inspections on police dogs, including the compounds and vehicles in which they are transported, to ensure their treatment is humane and transparent.)

Police dogs vary in breed and the work that they do. There are General Patrol (GP) dogs which 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 Needs on which the Animal Welfare Act 2006 is based (see next section).

Overview of the Scheme

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The unit complies with the RSPCA’s Five Needs on which the Animal Welfare Act 2006 is based (see next section).
As of 31 March 2013, at the beginning of the reporting period, the joint Independent Dog Welfare Visiting Scheme had five Dog Welfare Visitors. During the course of the reporting period, three visitors resigned from the scheme and, as of 31 March 2014, there are two active Dog Welfare Visitors. One visitor is from Cambridgeshire and one from Hertfordshire.

A recent change to the visiting arrangements from previous years has taken place. Previously, visitors made inspections on training days, however a more flexible approach has now been adopted where visitors can now arrange to see the dogs at a location of their choice on any given day and time, including weekends, at an agreed police location.

The visitor is then advised by the dog unit which dogs are available to be seen during that 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, or a member of staff at all times. At each visit, visitors complete a form to indicate observations and all records of visits are held.

At the end of each visit, the form is sent to the Scheme Administrator and the Dog Unit. Any information noted on the reports or gathered during a visit is confidential.

Inspections are based on the RSPCA’s Five Needs. 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, Dog Unit representatives and a Dogs Trust representative. Issues arising from visits are discussed. Updates are given from the Dogs Trust representative as well as the Dog Unit Inspector (police), including information on when a dog has had a major injury or surgery, or if a dog has been retired.

Some of the key points from the 2013 - 2014 panel meetings are highlighted below:

• Reporting forms - slight amendments were made to forms for better record keeping and ease of use
• Visit arrangements - changes were made to how visits are arranged, as above
• Recruitment - an initiative to recruit more volunteers is underway

Statistics

Between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014, there were 59 police dogs, including puppies and dogs in training who were not yet active. During the year 55 dogs were seen and six dogs were retired.

There were no serious concerns reported regarding the welfare of dogs. Minor dog ailments were noted by visitors but all of these were under veterinary treatment and actively monitored by the handlers. Slight issues were raised regarding the inside of cages, however, this was deemed harmless to the dogs.

Contacts

For more information, please contact:

Dog Welfare Visiting Scheme Administrator
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
15 Vaughan Road
Harpenden
AL5 4GZ

Telephone: 01707 806100

Email: commissioner@herts.pnn.police.uk

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