

Joint Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire Independent Dog Welfare Visiting Scheme



Annual Report 2014 - 15



Introduction

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, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire.

Overview of the Scheme

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 6 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.

Inspection Visits

As of 31 March 2014, at the beginning of the reporting period, the joint Independent Dog Welfare Visiting Scheme had two Dog Welfare Visitors. During the course of the reporting period, a recruitment drive brought that number up to five active Dog Welfare Visitors. One visitor is from Cambridge, one from Bedfordshire and three 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 dog unit 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.

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 RSPCAs '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 once 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 the 2014 - 2015 panel meetings, visitors received a training session, met with a dog handler and were given more information about the dogs. They also discussed a recruitment drive.

Statistics

Between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015, volunteers made 167 visits, seeing over 60 dogs.

During this time there were no serious concerns reported regarding the welfare of dogs. Minor dog ailments were noted by visitors but all of these were under vet treatment and actively monitored by the handlers.

Contacts

For more information, please contact:

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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