



# Independent Dog Welfare Visitors Scheme

## Annual Report

2023 – 2024



**Foreword by Darryl Preston, Police and Crime Commissioner for  
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.**



Over the last year, Independent Dog Welfare Visitors have continued to provide essential and robust scrutiny of the care and treatment of police dogs. They ensured that procedures are ethical, humane, and transparent in accordance with the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

The welfare scheme continues to operate an effective and transparent scheme, intended to maintain public confidence and assurance to the residents of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire that police dogs are being well cared for.

This annual report highlights a positive working relationship between the Dog Unit and the Welfare Visitors.

My Office have been responsible for Administering the scheme on behalf of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire.

Community Visitors are vital for supporting my scrutiny work and helping me to hold the force to account on behalf of the public.

Darryl Preston, Police and Crime Commissioner

## **Background to the Scheme**

The Dog Welfare Scheme has evolved over time, resulting in the establishment of the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Hertfordshire (BCH) Independent Dog Welfare Visiting Scheme. Its development started in Hertfordshire when the first independent visiting scheme was set up in 2006. In 2009 this became a collaborated scheme when Bedfordshire joined the scheme. Luton International Airport (LIA) joined the scheme two years later with Cambridgeshire joining the scheme in 2012. That same year, responsibility for the scheme was passed to the newly elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), with Hertfordshire's Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) retaining administrative responsibility for the Scheme on behalf the three PCCs.

In the spirit of collaboration, during 2023-24, administration for the scheme was passed to Cambridgeshire. This shared the responsibility and continued the effective collaboration and cooperation across the three Forces.

In April 2024, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) set out the nationally agreed minimum standards for all police forces and their Chief Constables who have police dog units. For Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Hertfordshire (BCH), this is a collaborated dog unit. The new national standards for the deployment and care of police dogs and the Authorised Professional Practise (APP) are embedded within this Annual Report. These streamline the previous guidance and mandates minimum standards, which brings the specialism in line with other similar areas of policing and bring gives recognition to the speciality of the police dog capability.

The standards rightly place a significant emphasis on the welfare and care of police dogs, highlighting the necessity to recognise their individual. They dedicate a lifetime of service, working alongside police officers and staff in keeping our communities safe. These standards will be subject to regular review through the Police Dog Policy Sub-Group, ensuring policy, training, accreditation, and emerging threats are incorporated and remain current.

Independent Dog Welfare Visitors continue to provide essential scrutiny into the wellbeing and care of our Police Dogs across BCH. With a team of over fifty dogs spread across three counties who provide 24/7 policing, handlers hold a unique specialist role within the policing family, taking their partner home with them. They are committed, dedicated, enthusiastic and professional with an overwhelming love and respect for dogs.

### **Overview of the Scheme**

Cambridgeshire OPCC took over the administration of the scheme in July 2023, supported by both Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire's OPCC.

The aim of the scheme is to inspect the welfare of every police dog, this includes those due to retire. There are currently fifty-one dogs across BCH and thirteen based at LIA. Visits are based on a 10-week rotation. If a dog misses a scheduled visit, they are either added to an alternative scheduled visit or an added visit is arranged. Visits may be missed due to Handlers being on annual leave, sickness, or work commitments. It is expected all dogs will be seen twice a year although additional visits will be arranged if any concerns arise. A few of the dogs have been seen more frequently as they have supported in our volunteer training and enabled additional shadow visits.

Independent Dog Welfare Visitors are members of the public who observe, comment and report on the condition of the dogs and their means of transportation whilst on duty. To maintain the scheme's independence and avoid any conflict of interest, visitors have no direct involvement with the three forces. Welfare visitors are not allowed to be a serving or retired police officer, a member of police staff, police community support officer, special constable, or magistrate.

Welfare visitors carry out inspections on all police dogs within the Dog Unit. The Unit includes 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 include dogs that specialise in detecting drugs, cash, guns, weapons, explosives, and digital media.

In February, this year we were delighted to receive confirmation from the Dogs Trust to say we are a recognised and monitored Animal Welfare Scheme. Dogs Trust ensures that the scheme is running in accordance with its guidelines and awards those who are complying with the scheme a certificate of compliance. Only those forces that are members of the Animal Welfare Independent Visitors Scheme are allowed to adopt or rehome dogs from Dogs Trust.



### **Recruitment and Training Independent Dog Welfare Visitors.**

Currently the scheme has eight Independent Dog Welfare Visitors providing representation from across BCH. All welfare visitors are required to be vetted before appointment and that is reviewed every three years.

There is comprehensive training programme for new welfare visitors. This includes briefings from the Dogs Trust on training methods, animal welfare, transportation, health, and safety. Any new Visitors must complete a six-month probation period to ensure they understand the monitoring arrangements and can carry out visits with confidence. New welfare visitors will carry out at least one shadow visit with one of our experienced welfare visitors, more if needed until they are comfortable conducting visits on their own. There is an ongoing training programme and support is provided for all our welfare visitors.

In March, this year two members of the scheme also attended Enrichment Continuous Professional Development (CPD) online training. This was delivered by the Dogs Trust and added an additional layer of knowledge which members found useful.

Welfare Visitors do not receive a salary but are reimbursed for any out-of-pocket expenses incurred when undertaking a visit.

### **Meetings**

Quarterly meetings are held between Animal Welfare Scheme Leads from Essex, Kent and Cambridgeshire (Cambridgeshire lead on behalf of BCH) meetings are also held regularly between BCH Dog Unit and LIA Leads and BCH Scheme Lead, constantly looking at ways to improve the scheme and share good practice across Forces. Now we have a larger team of Visitors we are looking to hold Bi-annual Panel Meetings with Visitors and representatives from the BCH Dog Unit and LIA Team. This will be an opportunity to make Visitors aware of any legislative changes and updates from the Dog Unit, as well as for the unit to receive feedback directly from Visitors.

### **Welfare Visiting Arrangements**

Welfare visits are arranged for an agreed location on any given date and time by the Dog Unit, LIA representative and the Scheme Administrator. Visits primarily take place at the three-force headquarters and at a facility at Luton Airport, although this can vary, and other locations can be used. The times of visits may also vary at short notice, for example, handlers will not train during extremely hot weather conditions therefore visits may be carried out early morning when temperature is cooler.

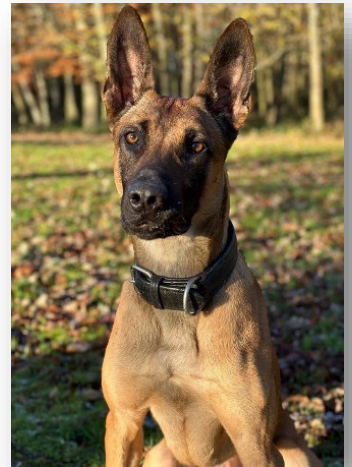
In advance of their visit, Welfare Visitors are informed of which dogs are available to be seen and given access to comments from earlier visits by the Scheme Administrator. This enables Welfare Visitors to follow up on any health or welfare issues previously highlighted. Visits are also arranged prior to the retirement of any of the dogs, one retirement visit has been carried out this year.

The visits took place at various locations across the three forces with a variety of different environments, its vital that the dogs train in different environments to ensure they are confident when carrying out their duties.

## Reporting and Recording

Visitors record all observations, comments and any concerns relating to individual welfare needs on a report which covers five welfare needs. These are their;

- need for a suitable environment
- need for a suitable diet
- need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns.
- need to be housed with or apart from other animals.
- need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury, and disease.



Completed reports are counter-signed by the handler who has an opportunity to record any further observations and details. These are then sent to Scheme Administrator for oversight.

If a welfare issue is reported, the Scheme Administrator will raise this directly with the Dog Unit or LIA Team. Concerns can also be escalated directly within each of the Office of Police and Crime Commissioners and the Constabularies. Any action taken to resolve issues is recorded by the Scheme Administrator. All information noted on the report form or gathered at the visits is confidential for use by the Office of the Police Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and the Dog Unit. General welfare updates are shared across the three Forces, and this is logged on individual Police Dog Profiles. The profiles include due dates for vaccinations, worming, flea treatment any visits to the vet is recorded along with any medication taken, regular weight checks are also recorded. There is also a photo of each dog along with, breed, microchip number and the role of the dog. Handler's name is also included in this profile.

## Visits from the past year

Between April 2023 and March 2024, welfare visitors completed eight visits, which included visiting one of the dogs prior to him retiring from the Unit. In total forty-four dogs have been seen across the three counties. The availability of welfare visitors has restricted the ability to conduct the required level of visits. It was for this reason that it was decided to increase the team numbers to ensure there is the level of

resources available to carry out more frequent visits, with the objective of visiting all dogs. This is the ambition for 2024-25.



### **Dog Welfare Findings**

Welfare visitors check the condition of the police dogs and their means of transportation while on duty. Over the last 11 months of the forty-four dogs visited, no serious concerns were recorded, it was noted that one of the dogs had been spayed, with no concerns and had made full recovery, dental work on of the older dogs, one dog had sore foot pad, all dogs were treated quickly and effectively and there has been no long-term effects of any of these reported issues.

Welfare visitors recorded positive comments about the general welfare of the dogs, up-to-date vaccinations, and health checks. Welfare visitors also commented positively on the healthy weight of the dogs, their movement, the condition of their coats as well as the good rapport between dogs and handlers.

### **Complaints**

Complaints made directly to the individual Constabulary or the OPCC are handled in line with local complaint handling procedures.

If a welfare visitor receives information or a complaint in confidence about the welfare of a dog, they must send it at once to the Scheme Administrator who will arrange for the matter to be handled in line with the local handling procedures.

### **Looking forward.**

In April 2024, the NPCC set out the nationally agreed minimum standards for all police forces and their Chief Constables who have police dog units. We will use these minimum standards and the APP in support of the welfare visits to ensure compliance, with an emphasis upon continuous improvement. We will increase the



skills of our welfare visitors, working with them to improve reporting and recording procedures.



### **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 a suitable toilet area, away from its rest area, to use as often 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 can move around to ensure comfort, avoiding becoming too hot or too cold.
  - When transporting dogs, ensure they are always comfortable and safe.
  - Do not leave dogs unattended in any situation, or for any period 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 show 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.

[Animal Welfare Visiting Scheme \(cambridgeshire-pcc.gov.uk\)](http://cambridgeshire-pcc.gov.uk)

[Complaints and Reviews \(cambridgeshire-pcc.gov.uk\)](http://cambridgeshire-pcc.gov.uk)