

Independent Dog Welfare Visitors Scheme Annual Report 2022 – 2023



Foreword by David Lloyd, Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire



Over the last year, Independent Dog Welfare Visitors 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 continued to operate as an effective and transparent scheme, providing assurance to Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire residents that police dogs are being well cared for.

The report highlights that there have been efforts to try and move to unannounced visits of dogs and rotating locations within the tri-force area but this has had a number of logistical challenges. As a result, 12 visits were undertaken across the tri-force area between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, down slightly from 14 the previous year¹. Moving forward, I am confident that these issues have been addressed by the Dog Unit leadership team. The increased involvement of Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire in the management of the scheme will only serve to reinvigorate it and take the scheme forward.

Once again, I am pleased to note that the Dog Welfare Visitors did not raise any serious concerns for those dogs that they visited. I am also pleased to note that the Dog Unit has taken on a number of new dogs which should enhance the service that they already provide.

As we reflect on what has been another challenging year for the scheme, albeit for very different reasons to those that the Covid-19 pandemic brought, I would like to pay tribute to all those Dog Welfare Visitors who volunteer their time to support this important scrutiny function across Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Lloyd". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

David Lloyd

Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner

¹ The maximum number of possible visits each year is 26 but due to volunteer availability and breaks in the training schedule the actual number of visits undertaken will be lower.

Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire (BCH) Dog Unit



The Independent Dog Welfare Visitors continue to provide essential scrutiny into the wellbeing and care of our Police Dogs across Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. With a team of over 50 dogs spread across three counties who provide 24/7 policing, we are grateful to the coordination team from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner in their attempts to maximise the number of visits from their pool of dedicated volunteers.

If there is one thing I have discovered since joining the Dog Unit, it is how passionate the Handlers are about the training and welfare of their dogs. Being part of the Animal Welfare Visitor Scheme within BCH is something I am proud of; anything that we can do as a Unit to demonstrate the passion, care and professionalism our Handlers display on a daily basis towards their dogs, is always going to be positive. Dog Handling is a unique and specialised role, the responsibilities do not stop at the end of a working day. It takes a special person to be able to fulfil the role of a Dog Handler, one who is committed, dedicated, enthusiastic and professional with an overwhelming love and respect for dogs. I am privileged to lead a Unit of Handlers who possess these traits and, go above and beyond for the welfare of their dogs.

Over the past 12 months there were attempts made by the Dog Unit leadership to alter the scheme, by allowing for unannounced visits to Police Dog training, however logistical issues meant that this was often not feasible for our volunteers. As a result, we moved back to our model of allocated visits at a Police Headquarters site. I'm really grateful for the dedication from the team of volunteers and the coordination team as they valiantly tried to make the new concept work. Whilst we are not where we aspire to be with the Scheme and the logistics of visits, we are definitely on the right trajectory and I am confident that with the additional support of Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, the Scheme will further flourish.

I am grateful to the volunteers who give up their free time to carry out such an important role. We would not be where we are today with some of the equipment or protocols we have in place without them. The feedback received from the Dog handlers across BCH is always so positive about our volunteers, and I look forward to this relationship continuing to be so positive in the year ahead.

Inspector James Lacey

Hertfordshire Constabulary

Background to the Scheme

The Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Hertfordshire (BCH) Independent Dog Welfare Visiting Scheme was established in 2012. Over the years, this has taken several different forms. The first visiting scheme in Hertfordshire was established in 2006. This became a collaborated scheme with Bedfordshire in 2009. Luton International Airport (LIA) subsequently became involved in 2011² with Cambridge Constabulary joining the scheme in 2012 when it became a responsibility for newly elected Police and Crime Commissioners.

Overview of the Scheme

The aim of the scheme is to inspect each police dog every three months and not later than every six months. There are 51 dogs across BCH and 12 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 a special visit is arranged.

Independent Dog Welfare Visitors (henceforth referred to as 'Visitors') are members of the public who observe, comment and report on the condition of the police 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 Hertfordshire Constabulary, Cambridgeshire Constabulary or Bedfordshire Police. They are not allowed to be a serving or retired police officer, a member of police staff, Police Community Support Officer, Special Constable or Magistrate.

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, and explosives.



PD Bear

Recruitment of the Independent Dog Welfare Visitors

As of 1 April 2022, the Scheme had six Visitors providing representation from Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. By the end of the reporting year, two had stood down for personal reasons. At present Bedfordshire have no representation. This is a priority issue for the scheme over the coming months.

² 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 then Chief Inspector 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.

Appointments are reviewed every three years. The current four Visitors have been in post for several years: three have more than five years' service, and the fourth has two years' service.

There is comprehensive training for new Visitors which includes input from the Dogs Trust on training methods, animal welfare, transportation and 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.

Visitors are volunteers. They do not receive a salary but are reimbursed for any expenses incurred when undertaking a visit.

Visiting Arrangements

Visits are arranged for an agreed police training 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. In advance of their visit, Visitors are informed of which dogs are available to be seen and given access to comments from previous visits by the Scheme Administrator so they are aware of and can follow up on any health or welfare issues previously highlighted.



Search Training

Reporting and Recording

Visitors 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 five categories (see Appendix 1).

Completed report forms are sent to the Scheme Administrator. If a welfare issue is reported, the Scheme Administrator will raise this directly with the Dog Unit or LIA Team. 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 OPCC and Dog Unit.

Panel Meetings

Bi-annual Panel Meetings are held with Visitors and representatives from the BCH Dog Unit and LIA Team. This is 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.

Visits from the past year

Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, Visitors completed 12 visits, resulting in 55 dog checks across the three counties.

The visits took place at Hertfordshire Police HQ, the Alconbury training site in Cambridgeshire and Luton Airport. Alconbury was closed in March 2023 and there are plans in place to build a new replacement training facility in Monks Wood, Cambridgeshire.

Over the last 12 months a review was conducted of visiting arrangements. The aim was to revise the visiting procedure to make it more flexible, make visits unannounced and enable the visitors to see the dogs in a variety of different environments and at different points in the training cycle.

A number of challenges were encountered when trying to implement this. This led to the low number of visits rather than the stated aim of 26.

One of the key challenges was that training locations were subject to change at short notice. This created logistical difficulties for Visitors, for example being asked to go to Cambridgeshire instead of Hertfordshire at short notice. Gaining timely access to training schedules in advance to schedule visits was also difficult due to operational demands. In the past Visitors were given 2-3 weeks notice of a visit, but the new system reduced this to 1-2 days notice creating diary challenges for Visitors

Throughout the year different options for undertaking the visits were scoped and worked through. However, none of these proved satisfactory and in March 2023 it was decided to revert to the previous system of pre-arranged visits on a 10 week cycle.

Dog Welfare Findings



PD Bonnie

Visitors monitor the condition of the police dogs and their means of transportation while on duty.

Over the last twelve months no serious concerns were noted.

Of the 55 dogs visited, 6 minor injuries were noted for 6 different dogs including: sore foot pads, treatment for eczema on a tail; and planned surgery to remove some cysts. All dogs were treated quickly and effectively and there has been no long term effects of any of these reported issues. Visitors recorded positive comments about up to date vaccinations and medication for dogs.

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 Constabulary or OPCC will be handled according to the relevant complaint procedure³.

If a Visitor receives information or a complaint in confidence regarding the welfare of a dog, they must forward it immediately to the Scheme Administrator who will arrange for the matter to be investigated.

In the last 12 months, the Constabulary received one complaint about the welfare of one dog which is under investigation. No further comment regarding the nature of this complaint can be made at the time of writing.

Dog Unit Update

Within the last year a restructuring and rebalancing of the Dog Unit has taken place. Some handlers have retired, and new handlers have been recruited. 28 dogs were retired for a variety of reasons, including their age, on medical grounds or not reaching the required training standard. 19 new dogs and three new handlers have been recruited and the team has been rebalanced to ensure a better spread of general purpose and specialist skills across all teams including Drugs/Cash/Weapons training and Digital Media.

Scheme Update

Hertfordshire has historically overseen the joint scheme on behalf of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. Moving forward it has been agreed that the scheme will adopt a lead force model. For 2023/2024 Cambridgeshire will be the lead force. It is expected that with increased involvement from each area there will be fresh perspectives and ideas to raise the standards of the scheme enabling the public to maintain confidence that dogs within the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire force areas are well treated and cared for.

³ <https://www.hertscommissioner.org/contact-us-complaints/>

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.

Interested in becoming an Independent Dog Welfare Visitor?

If you are interested in becoming an Independent Dog welfare Visitor please contact:

Independent Dog Welfare Visiting Scheme Administrator
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire
13 Vaughan Road
Harpenden
AL5 4GZ

Telephone: 01707 806100

Email: pccadmin@herts-pcc.gov.uk

For more information regarding the role of Visitors and that of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire, please visit www.hertscommissioner.org

We welcome applications from anyone who lives, works or studies in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire or Cambridgeshire. The OPCC is particularly interested to hear from younger people and those from Black, Asian and all Ethnic communities.