

# **Volunteer Dog Welfare Scheme Annual Report**

**2023-2024**



Dog  
Welfare



## The Staffordshire Volunteer Dog Welfare Scheme

The death of Acer, a police dog in 1997, and the subsequent prosecution of police officers, resulted in a loss of public confidence in police dog training methods. The incident generated adverse comments in the media and caused several animal welfare organisations – including Dogs Trust, to stop rehoming dogs to the police.

In response to these issues, a sub-committee of the National Police Chief's Council, (formerly known as the Association of Chief Police Officers, or ACPO) embarked upon a thorough review of police dog training. The team developed a strategy aimed at restoring public confidence by ensuring that training methods are humane, ethical and transparent. The strategy focuses on six key areas, including the welfare and treatment of dogs, alongside raising awareness amongst the public of the work of police dogs. The use of items such as barbed 'Pinch Collars' and electric collars, which were used to punish dogs was banned at the time of the ACPO review.

The training and welfare of dogs engaged in police work must be open and be seen to be open. To this end, the Animal Welfare Independent Visitors Scheme was successfully piloted by Lancashire Police force and then rolled out across other forces. The Scheme became operational in Staffordshire in late 2019. However, the pandemic of 2021-2022 mean the Scheme was suspended and the first complete year of visits has been 2023-2024.

Dog Welfare Volunteers are independent members of the local community who volunteer on behalf of the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office (SCO). The DWS Volunteers are managed by a small team within the SCO. They may be accompanied by professionals from animal welfare organisations, who will visit police animal training centres to check on the welfare of animals engaged in police work.

The purpose of the scheme is to enable members of the local community, under the guidance of the Commissioner's Office, with the assistance of the appropriate national animal welfare organisations to observe, comment and report on the welfare of animals engaged in Police work, with a view to securing greater understanding and confidence in these matters. These arrangements also provide an independent check on police dog training methods and the conditions under which the dogs are transported and housed in order that it can be demonstrated that such methods are humane, ethical and open to public accountability.



Each Welfare visit requires two Dog Welfare Scheme volunteers to attend. After each welfare visit the volunteers will complete a DWS report form for each dog. The form covers the **5 Needs** that are laid out by the Animal Welfare Act 2006. These include:

- Suitable environment
- Suitable diet
- Exhibit normal behavior patterns
- Housed with, or apart, from other animals
- Protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

It is the aim of the Scheme for each dog to be visited/seen at least twice a year.

| <b>Staffordshire Dog Welfare Scheme - Statistics as at 31.03.2024</b> |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| Number of Dogs  | 29                         |
| Number of Volunteers  | 5                          |
| Number of Welfare Checks conducted                                    | 13 visits and 28 dogs seen |
| Number of Panel Meetings undertaken                                   | 5                          |
| Number of Induction/ Refresher Training Sessions undertaken           | 1                          |



## KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED DURING 2023-2024

|                     | Issue Identified   | Force Response   |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Dog Wash Area at HQ | <p>The dog wash area was also being utilised by the car wash team. Volunteers initially raised concerns in March 2023. This included car cleaning chemicals being left in the dog wash area and the contamination of the Dog Wash area by corrosive substances used to clean the cars.</p> <p>This resolution seemed to work well but was raised again during an inspection in March 2024 where volunteers observed other officers accessing and using the storage area.</p> | <p>The Force arranged for the storage of the chemicals to be removed from the Dog Wash store area. Request was made to move the dog wash area to a safer environment.</p> <p>The Force have indicated that a new dog wash area is on the cards following the recent Estates plan and is still subject to approval.</p> <p>The Force have indicated that the works have now finally been completed meaning the dog support unit have sole use of the building and dog wash area. This now mitigates the risk of contamination and maximises the safety of the dogs.</p> |
| Dog Transporter     | <p>Volunteers have raised their vociferous and regular concerns about the large dog transporter van. There have been numerous reports of the dangerous condition of this vehicle. The pods are rusty and sharp edges identified. The Dog Unit have put forward a business case for the replacement of this and other vehicles which are 10 years old. Volunteers have been made aware of an injury to a dog (PD Vixen).</p>  | <p>Still awaiting confirmation of new vehicles. The Force indicated that two new vehicles were due in April 2024. A third training vehicle has now been requested. One of the vehicles has been completely refurbished and the dangerous pods and floors replaced.</p>   |
| Agility Field       | <p>The dog agility field at HQ has been out of action for over 18 months. It is unsafe due to the rabbit infestation and the holes caused by the rabbit burrows.</p> <p>The volunteers are concerned that dogs at HQ have insufficient area to rest and exercise.</p>  | <p>Officers are able to use the field at the County Showground. There are plans to have an agility field as part of the future Estate Plan but this is subject to approval and planning permission.</p>  |
| Kennel Area at HQ   | <p>Volunteers have raised concerns about the lack of kennels at HQ and other response stations, in particular Longton and Burton</p>   | <p>New kennels have been implemented which are of a very high standard and will give the dogs plenty of space to move around in fresh air. There is a separate compartment within the kennel where dogs can lie down and rest if needed. The Dog Team Lead should be thanked for his role in ensuring dogs now have a suitable place to use when not out on a call. There are no kennel facilities at Longton as yet.</p>  |



## Observations

The volunteers regularly noted in their reports that the officers of the Dog Unit have exceptional relationships with their dogs and this is very apparent from their observations.

They would also like to thank the Dog Unit for their patience and understanding and for taking the time to fully explain and answer any questions the volunteers ask of them on their welfare visits. Officers have been very transparent and open and the volunteers appreciate their frankness and honesty in ensuring the best outcome for their dogs.



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