



THE ANIMAL WELFARE LAY VISITORS SCHEME

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The death of a police dog 'Acer' whilst in training in Essex and the subsequent prosecution of police officers, resulted in an understandable loss of public confidence in police dog training methods, generated adverse comment in the media and caused animal welfare organisations such as the RSPCA and the NCDL to stop donating dogs to the service. In response to these issues, the ACPO Police Dog Sub-Committee embarked upon a thorough review of police dog training and has developed a six point strategy aimed at restoring public confidence by ensuring that police dog training methods are humane, ethical and transparent.

Central to this issue of re-building public confidence and ensuring that the welfare of animals engaged in police work is maintained and any mistreatment is identified and dealt with promptly, is a need for transparency. In other words, the training and welfare of animals engaged on police work must be open and, as importantly, be seen to be open. To this end, an Animal Welfare Lay Visitors Scheme has been introduced which will enable members of the local community to observe and report upon the conditions under which both police dogs and horses are housed, trained and transported.

Animal Welfare Lay Visitors are independent members of the local community, who may be accompanied by professionals from animal welfare organisations who will visit police dog training centres, mounted sections and police stations unannounced to check on the welfare of animals engaged in police work. They come from a variety of backgrounds and sections of the community and have no direct or indirect involvement in the criminal justice system. This is to prevent possible conflicts of interests for the individual, and to maintain the independence of the scheme as a whole.

The Lancashire Police Authority has established this scheme in consultation with the Chief Constable of Lancashire along with the RSPCA and the National Canine Defence League. The operation of the scheme is the responsibility of the Police Authority, and that responsibility is exercised, in consultation with the Chief Constable. The police authority has the final responsibility in all matters relating to the operation of the scheme.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SCHEME

The purpose of the scheme is to enable members of the local community with the assistance of the appropriate national animal welfare organisation(s) to observe, comment and report on the conditions under which dogs and horses are housed, trained and transported with a view to securing greater understanding and confidence in these matters. These arrangements also provide an independent check on the way police dog handlers and police mounted officers carry out their responsibilities with regard to the welfare of animals in their care.

APPOINTMENT OF VISITORS

The Police Authority will be responsible for the selection and appointment of Animal Welfare Lay Visitors and will consult with the Chief Constable and the appropriate professional national animal welfare organisation(s) before any appointment is made. Subject to the exceptions set out below applications will be sought from any person over 18 residing within Lancashire, and professionals from animal welfare organisations.

NUMBER OF VISITORS – METHOD OF APPOINTMENT

It is considered important that the Panel should be representative of the local community and the Police Authority will try to achieve a balance in terms of age range, gender and ethnic minority representation. The Police Authority will have authority to vary the number of visitors on the panel in the light of experience. The Lancashire Police Authority's Animal Welfare Lay Visitors Panel shall consist of 14 Lay Visitors representing the 14 Council Areas covered by the Lancashire Constabulary, 2 representatives from the RSPCA and a representative from the National Canine Defence League.

Eligibility

Visitors should be independent persons of good character who are able to make unbiased observations in which the community can have confidence and which the police will accept as fair criticism when it is justified. Anyone who has been convicted of an offence, or who has been charged with any animal welfare issue may not be suitable for this reason. Applicants will therefore be asked to include on their application form details of any such convictions and consent to enquiries being made by the police and the appropriate professional national animal welfare organisation(s). Where the information provided by the police and the appropriate professional national animal welfare organisation(s) differs from that provided by the applicant, the Police Authority will discuss the discrepancy with the person concerned before deciding whether or not to appoint.

Elected members of the police authority, provided they are not also magistrates, are eligible to become lay visitors. They must, however, attend training sessions before being issued with the appropriate accreditation.

The Police Authority will not appoint magistrates, and serving or former police officers or special constables as lay visitors. Other people may be excluded, after discussion with the individual applicant, if they have a direct involvement in the criminal justice system such as solicitors or probation officers.

Each application will be treated on its merits, but the over-riding factor will be to prevent possible conflicts of interest for individuals, and to maintain the independence and integrity of the scheme as a whole.

TRAINING

Applicants will be invited to attend information / training sessions organised by the Police Authority in consultation with the Chief Constable and the appropriate professional national animal welfare organisations. The training is will be of one day's duration, on such topics as training methods, animal welfare, transportation and health and safety.

The Police Authority may also periodically arrange training sessions in response to new training practices and procedures adopted by the Constabulary.

ACCREDITATION AND HANDBOOK

Following notification of their appointment, the Police Authority will issue each lay visitor with an identity card signed by the Chief Constable and showing and the holders photograph.

The identity card will authorise the holder to enter appropriate police stations and the Mounted Section and Dog Training Centre to undertake a visit in accordance with the scheme. The pass should be worn visibly on the outer clothing when on police premises.

Lay visitors identity cards should be used only for the purpose of making lay visits. If anyone is found to be using his or her card for any other purpose, it will be withdrawn and that persons appointment as a lay visitor may be terminated.

Each visitor will receive a handbook containing details of the operation of the scheme, a list of the police premises subject to the scheme, a list of the members of the visiting panel, including contact telephone numbers, a list of police dog handlers and their dogs, a list of mounted officers and horses and a synopsis of the procedures for dealing with police dogs and police horses.

TERM OF OFFICE OF VISITORS

Newly appointed lay visitors will complete a 6 month probationary period.

The term of office of Animal Welfare Lay Visitors should be three years with an option for renewal for further three year terms. Each Animal Welfare Lay Visitor should hold office for the period for which he or she is appointed provided that the Police Authority may, in its absolute discretion, terminate his or her appointment at any time.

REMOVAL FROM VISITORS PANEL

Although the work is entirely voluntary, the Police Authority has the right to terminate the appointment of any lay visitor whose conduct is not felt to be of the required standard.

Visitors should notify the clerk to the Police Authority if they are arrested and charged with a criminal offence or under investigation for any animal welfare issue and will be suspended from undertaking further visits, pending the outcome of any criminal

proceedings. The Police Authority will consider whether to withdraw the accreditation of any visitor convicted of a criminal offence or who abuses his or her position as an Animal Welfare Lay Visitor by behaving in an inappropriate manner during visits.

Where a visitor fails to make a lay visit and attend panel meetings within a 3 month period the Police Authority will write to the person concerned to establish whether this is simply an oversight (e.g. because report forms have not been submitted), or to seek an explanation.

Where an individual has not made any visits or attended any panel meetings within a 6 month period, and no good reason for this has been notified to the administrator of the scheme, the Police Authority will automatically revoke that individuals accreditation.

FREQUENCY OF VISITS AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR VISITS

Police Stations from which dog handlers operate from should be visited a minimum of once per month. The Animal Welfare Lay Visitor may request any police dog handler who is on duty in that area to attend the police station. The dog handlers should then be called immediately. If the officer is unable to attend, for example if the officer is engaged on a specific incident, a full explanation should be given to the Animal Welfare Lay Visitor and the explanation should be recorded by the visitor in their report. It is a requirement of the scheme that all dog handlers within a particular police division receive at least one visit in any 6 month period.

The Police Dog training Centre at Hutton and the Mounted Section at Hutton should receive a minimum of one visit per month. Access will be granted between the hours of 8.00am – 4.00pm and subject to staff being available. Animal Welfare Lay Visitors may inspect the conditions in which dogs and horses are kept and be allowed access to any welfare, training and veterinary records appertaining to those animals. They may also speak to trainers, trainees, dog handlers, mounted officers and support staff.

From time to time, Animal Welfare Lay Visitors may also wish to look at 'offsite' training. Such 'offsite' training may involve Animal Welfare Lay Visitors walking over farm land and rough fields. With this in mind the Police Authority will look to appoint those people who would be capable of carrying out this type of activity. Because of the diverse locations, Animal Welfare Lay Visitors should, in those instances, arrange visits through the Scheme Administrator or the Officer in Charge of the Police Dog Section or the Police Mounted Branch.

The Police Authority may review the frequency of visits from time to time in the light of experience.

CONFIDENTIALITY

During the course of their duties, Animal Welfare Lay Visitors may acquire confidential information about police issues, and visitors will therefore be asked to sign an undertaking of confidentiality. Visitors should be aware that the improper disclosure of information acquired during a visit may attract civil or criminal proceedings. It is stressed that confidential information must not be included in the written reports to the Police Authority of the results of visits.

Should an Animal Welfare Lay Visitor receive information or a complaint in confidence regarding the welfare of a particular dog or horse, this information should

be forwarded immediately to the RSPCA representatives on the panel. The RSPCA representatives will then investigate any allegation made in the normal way.

Other lay visitors names, addresses, or telephone numbers are given to individual lay visitors in the strictest confidence, and are given to other lay visitors purely for convenience in making personal contact. Such details should not be divulged to any other person.

CONDUCT OF VISITS

When conducting a visit the Animal Welfare Lay Visitor(s) will, at all times, be accompanied by a dog handler or a member of staff at the Dog Training Centre or Mounted section. Visitor(s) must adhere to advice given by dog handlers, mounted officers, members of staff of the Dog Training Centre and Mounted Section with regard to any health and safety issues. Visitor(s) will not normally be entitled to visit officers' private residences to inspect kennel facilities: but in exceptional circumstances, a visitor may be asked to accompany a police officer to a dog handlers home – see under ' Police Initiated Visits'. However, the Visitor(s) may wish to bring to the attention of the Officer in Charge of the Police Dog training Centre any concerns they may have regarding a particular animal and that Officer will then take the appropriate action in relation to inspecting kennels maintained at a dog handler's home. Following consultation with that visitor the officer in charge will submit a full report to the appropriate Police Authority Committee.

All visits carried out by Animal Welfare Lay Visitors must meet the excepted standard endorsed by the RSPCA, NCDL, Lancashire Police Authority and Lancashire Constabulary.

Should an Animal Lay Visitor have concerns regarding the identity of a particular dog, the Animal Welfare Lay Visitor may request that the dog's electronic tag is scanned. This must be done in the presence of the Animal Welfare Lay Visitor.

VISITS AT THE REQUEST OF THE POLICE

Exceptionally, circumstances may arise where the police will wish to initiate a visit by an Animal Welfare Lay Visitor (including a dog handlers home address), in particular where there may be serious local concern about the treatment and well-being of police dogs and horses, and a special visit could help allay public fears. The Officer in Charge of the Dog Training Centre and the officer in Charge of the Mounted section will be responsible on these occasions for contacting an appropriate visitor and arranging a visit. Equally, if a specific complaint is received by the Police pertaining to animal welfare, the officer tasked with investigating the initial complaint should consider involving Lay Visitors qualified in animal welfare. This would include allegations in relation to an officer's home address.

COMPLETION OF REPORTS AND FOLLOW UP ACTION

Completion of reports

At the conclusion of each visit and before leaving the police premises, the Animal Welfare Lay Visitor(s) will complete a form in triplicate. The top copy of the report should be sent, as soon as possible, to the Scheme Administrator at the Lancashire Police Authority using the pre-paid envelopes provided. The second copy is to given to the Officer in Charge in order to be forwarded to the Superintendent (Operations).

The third copy is for the Animal Welfare Lay Visitor to keep and will remain in the book.

The Scheme Administrator shall periodically distribute all reports amongst the panel in order to keep panel members abreast of proceedings.

Reports on issues arising out of visits

The scheme administrator will call quarterly meetings of lay visitors which will allow the discussion of visiting arrangements and any concerns to be brought to the attention of the Officers in Charge.

Issues arising out of visits will also be submitted to the Police Authority, and subsequently to the relevant Police and Community Forum.

It is also expected that lay visitors will report on their visits in general terms to their local Police and Community Forum, at an appropriate time of the year, e.g. the Annual General Meeting. Such reports may be given in writing or orally.

Expenses

The work is entirely voluntary, but travelling expenses will be payable to all visitors on the same basis as to members of the police authority when travelling on authority business. Only public transport fares, or private car mileage at the agreed rate will be paid. Expenses can also be claimed for attending training sessions. Expense claims must be made on the appropriate form.

Insurance

The Police Authority has arranged appropriate insurance for lay visitors.

All Animal Welfare Lay Visitors will receive information and advice on Generic Risk Assessments carried out by the Lancashire Constabulary.

Publicity Guidelines

It is generally desirable that the role and aims of the scheme should be promoted to the public. Lay visitors must, however, bear in mind that the purpose of publicity is to inform the public about the scheme and not draw attention to individual cases or to themselves.

Any invitation to speak to the press, or local groups or organisations (other than the Police and Community Forums), about any aspect of lay visiting should be referred to the Police Authority and should not be undertaken by individual lay visitors except at the request of the Police Authority, who will in normal circumstances have consulted with the Chief Constable.

Lay Visitors should remember that they are accountable to the Police Authority, and not to the press or individual members of the public.