

ANIMAL WELFARE LAY VISITING SCHEME

1) ANIMAL WELFARE LAY VISITING

The death of a police dog 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 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 was introduced which enables members of the local community to observe and report upon the conditions under which the police dogs 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 animal training centres 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 scheme was established by the Nottinghamshire Police Authority in consultation with the Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire along with the RSPCA. The operation of the scheme is now the responsibility of the Police and Crime Commissioner, and that responsibility is exercised, in consultation with the Chief Constable. The Commissioner has the final responsibility in all matters relating to the operation of the scheme.

2) 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 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 training methods and the conditions under which the animals are transported and housed in order that it can be demonstrated that such methods are humane, ethical and open to public accountability.

3) 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 enquiry's being made by the police and the appropriate professional national animal welfare organisations. Where the information provided by the police and the appropriate professional national animal welfare organisations differs from that provided by the applicant, the Commissioner will discuss the discrepancy with the person concerned before deciding whether or not to appoint.

The Commissioner 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.

4) TRAINING

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

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

Experienced AWS volunteers have the opportunity to train new recruits during their 6 months probationary period, acting as mentors.

5) ACCREDITATION AND HANDBOOK

Following notification of their appointment and training, the Commissioner will issue each Lay Visitor with an identity card signed by the Chief Constable and showing the holder's photograph. The identity card will authorise the holder to enter the HQ kennels and stables 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 their card for any other purpose it will be withdrawn and that person's appointment as a lay visitor 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 and a list of police dog handlers and their dogs and police horses.

6) TERM OF OFFICE OF VISITORS

Newly appointed lay visitors will complete a six-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 Commissioner may, in its absolute discretion, terminate his or her appointment at any time.

7) REMOVAL FROM THE SCHEME

Although the work is entirely voluntary, the Commissioner 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 Commissioner 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 offence or 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 three-month period the Commissioner 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 six-month period, and no good reasons for this has been notified to the administrator of the scheme, the Commissioner will automatically revoke the individual's accreditation.

8) FREQUENCY OF VISITS AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR VISITS

The Nottinghamshire Force Headquarters Dog Kennels should receive a minimum of one visit every month. Access will be granted between the hours of 8am-4pm and subject to staff being available. Animal Welfare Lay Visitors may inspect the conditions in which dogs are kept and be allowed access to any welfare, and training records appertaining to those animals. They may also speak to trainers, trainees, dog handlers, support staff and veterinary surgeons used by the Police Dog Section.

The Animal Welfare Lay Visitor may request, via the Operations Room Officer in Charge, following a security check, any police dog handler who is on duty in that territorial divisions area to attend a police station, suitable to both, within that area. The appropriate dog handler 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.

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 farmland and rough fields. With this in mind the Commissioner 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.

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

9) 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 might attract civil or criminal proceedings. It is stressed that confidential information must not be included in the written reports to the Commissioner of the results of visits.

Should an Animal Welfare Lay Visitor receive information or a complaint in confidence regarding the welfare of a particular animal, 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.

10) CONDUCT OF VISITS

When conducting a visit the Animal Welfare Lay visitors will, at all times visit in pairs, be accompanied by a dog handler or a member of staff at the HQ Dog Kennels. Visitors must adhere to advice given by dog handlers, members of staff of the HQ Dog Kennels with regard to any health and safety issues. Visitors will not be entitled to visit officer's private residences to inspect kennel facilities, but in exceptional circumstances, a visitor may be asked to accompany a police officer to a dog handler's home. However, the visitors may wish to bring to the attention of the Office in Charge of the Police Dog Section 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 Commissioner.

All visits carried out by Animal Welfare Lay Visitors must meet the accepted standards endorsed by the RSPCA, the Commissioner and Nottinghamshire Constabulary.

Should an Animal Welfare Lay Visitor have concerns regarding the identity of a particular dog, the officer in charge of the dog section will identify a particular dog for the Animal Welfare Lay Visitor.

11) SAFETY AND SECURITY

In the interests of security and safety of the Animal Welfare Lay Visitors, they will be accompanied by a member of staff at all times during visits.

AWS Volunteers are provided with Health & Safety advice as part of their initial training. In addition, the NPCC will carry out risk assessments periodically to ensure the safety and accessibility of the locations for AWS Lay Visitors and will distribute the risk assessments accordingly.

12) ACCESS TO ALL AREAS WHERE ANIMALS ARE HELD, TRAINED AND TRANSPORTED

Animal Welfare Lay Visitors will wish to satisfy themselves that these areas are clean, tidy and in a reasonable state of repair and that bedding is clean and adequate. It is not necessary to inspect stores but AWS Lay Visitors should establish that suitable arrangements exist for adequate stocks of bedding and food. They may inspect empty kennels to check they are in an acceptable condition to house the animals.

13) MEDICAL CONDITIONS

AWS Lay Visitors will wish to pay particular attention to any animal suffering from illness, injury or disability. They should satisfy themselves that, if appropriate, a veterinarian has been informed and establish what instructions

for medical treatment have been given and whether they have been carried out.

14) COMPLETION OF REPORTS AND FOLLOW UP ACTION

At the conclusion of each visit and before leaving the police premises, the Animal Welfare Lay Visitor 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 Office of the Commissioner using the pre-paid envelopes provided. The second copy is for the Animal Welfare Lay Visitor to keep and third copy will remain in the book kept in the Dogs & Mounted Section.

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

15) REPORTS ON TREATMENT AND CONDITIONS

If a visit discloses any aspect of the treatment of animals or conditions which are unsatisfactory, they should be included on the report and raised with the duty officer at the time. Any action which the duty officer takes should also be recorded on the report form.

16) SERIOUS INJURY OR DEATH OF A POLICE ANIMAL

Where a serious injury or death of a police animal occurs, the Superintendent responsible will notify the Commissioner.

17) COMPLAINTS

Complaints Received Against Animal Welfare Lay Visitors

- (i) All complaints against Animal Welfare Lay Visitors, made by police personnel, or others who may come into contact with visitors whilst in the course of their duties, should be referred, in writing, to the Chief Executive to the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Complaints Made by Animal Welfare Lay Visitors

- (i) Any complaint made by an Animal Welfare Lay Visitor in respect of their treatment during visits will be raised in the first instance in their report and will thereafter be considered by the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- (ii) Complaints made by Animal Welfare Lay Visitors relating to police personnel should be reported to the respective line manager. If it is not possible to report the complaint immediately the full details should be

forwarded, in writing, to the Chief Executive of the Police and Crime Commissioner, by the custody visitor concerned.

- (iii) Complaints made by Animal Welfare Lay Visitors about other Animal Welfare Lay Visitors should in the first instance be brought to the attention of the Scheme Administrator.
- (iv) Complaints made by Animal Welfare Lay Visitors relating to Police and Crime Commissioner personnel should be made in writing to the Chief Executive of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

18) REPORTS ON ISSUES ARISING OUT OF VISITS

The Scheme Administrator will immediately take up any issues arising from reports with the Officer in Charge of Dogs and Mounted Section.

The Scheme Administrator will call 3 team meetings a year for AWS Lay Visitors, which will allow the discussion of visiting arrangements and any concerns to be brought to the attention of the Officer in Charge of Dogs and Mounted Section.

19) EXPENSES

The work is entirely voluntary, but travelling expenses will be payable to all visitors of the Police and Crime Commissioner when travelling on Commissioner 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.

(Appendix 6, Payment of Expenses, Appendix 7 Expenses Form)

20) INSURANCE

The Police and Crime Commissioner has arranged appropriate insurance cover for the AWS Lay Visitors during visits, through the Force Insurance Policy.

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

21) 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, about any aspect of lay visiting should be referred to the Commissioner's office and should not be undertaken by individual AWS Lay Visitors, except at the request of the Commissioner, who will in normal circumstances have consulted with the Chief Constable.

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