

## **THE ANIMAL WELFARE LAY VISITORS SCHEME**

The death of 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 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 is to be introduced which will enable 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 dog training centres, 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 scheme is to be established by the Nottinghamshire Police Authority in consultation with the Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire along with the RSPCA. 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 organisations to observe, comment and report on the conditions under which dogs 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 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 organisations before any appointment is made. Subject to the exceptions set out below, applications will be sought from any person over 18 residing with Nottinghamshire 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.

## **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. Future 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 Police Authority will discuss the discrepancy with the person concerned before deciding whether or not to appoint.

Elected members of the Police Authority and serving custody lay visitors, provided they are not also magistrates, are eligible to become lay visitors. They must, however, attend a training session 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 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 Police.

## **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 the holder's photograph. The identity card will authorise the holder to enter the HQ kennels 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.

## **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 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 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 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 six-month period, and no good reasons for this has been notified to the administrator of the scheme, the Police Authority will automatically revoke the individuals accreditation.

## **FREQUENCY OF VISITS AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR VISITS**

The Animal Welfare Lay Visitor may request, via the Operations Room Inspector, 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. It is a requirement of the scheme that all dog handlers within a particular police division receive at least one visit in any six-month period. The Animal Welfare Lay Visitor should aim for a bi-monthly visit.

The Nottinghamshire Force Headquarters Dog Kennels should receive a minimum of one visit every three months, again the aim being monthly. 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.

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 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.

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 might 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, 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 visitors will, at all times, be accompanied by a dog handler or a members 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 appropriate Police Authority Committee.

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

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

## **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 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 Nottinghamshire Police Authority using the pre-paid envelopes provided. The second copy is to be given to the Officer in charge in order to be forwarded to the Head of Operations Division.

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 six monthly meetings of lay visitors, which will allow the discussion of visiting arrangements and any concerns to be brought to the attention of the Officer in charge.

Issues arising out of visits will also be submitted to the Police Authority, and the Chief Constable of the Nottinghamshire Constabulary.

## **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 is to arrange appropriate insurance for lay visitors.

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