



PAW
prints

Stray dogs

a guide to good practice

PawPrints Awards:
Rewarding good practice



Contents

- 1 Celebrating good practice
- 2 Stray dog service: the importance of clear policies and procedures
- 3 Stray dog service: the basics
- 4 Stray dog policy: going beyond the basics
- 5 The RSPCA: a resource for stray dog service providers

To find out more:

England:

politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk

www.rspcapawprints.org.uk

Wales:

externalaffairscymru@rspca.org.uk

www.rspcapawprints.cymru

1 Celebrating good practice

The RSPCA's PawPrints (formerly Community Animal Welfare Footprints) Awards have been running for the past 10 years to recognise and promote the work of local authorities, housing providers, local resilience forums and the police in England and Wales that demonstrates good practice in animal welfare services. The Awards focus on five key areas: housing, contingency planning, licensing of animal activities, welfare of kennelled dogs and the subject of this guide – stray dogs.

This booklet gives guidance on what makes a good stray dog policy and highlights some of the good practice demonstrated by our PawPrint achievers. The information in the booklet is written to be suitable for everyone and should be a helpful refresher for those who are familiar with running and maintaining a stray dog service, as well as a good starting place for those new to the service or looking to overhaul a current provision. We hope to inspire local authorities to review and improve current policies and practice.

The RSPCA also hopes that this guide will encourage local authorities not currently participating in the scheme to promote their good work and seek recognition through the PawPrints Awards – something that can help protect services in the ever-increasing world of tightening budgets.

As part of the RSPCA's commitment to key stakeholders who directly affect the welfare of animals, we have a dedicated 24-hour local authority line to report concerns of cruelty or to receive advice.

Please note this number must not be given out to members of the public and only be used by local authority staff. The number is: 0300 123 8007



2 Stray dog service: the importance of clear policies and procedures

Research shows animals that are well cared for and responsibly kept can be a positive aspect of any community, as pet ownership often satisfies the need for companionship, daily routine and exercise.

Pet ownership can enhance the owner's mental and physical health and encourage exercise, plus pets make great companions. However, while dogs can have a very positive impact on their environment, irresponsibly owned dogs can be the cause of much misery and suffering to the dogs themselves, to those who live around them, and cost local authorities money in providing stray dog services.

It is therefore important to have clear (and proactive) policies and procedures when developing or reviewing the provision of a stray dog service. This ensures good animal welfare as well as officer safety and can save the local authority money. The focus should be on encouraging responsible dog ownership and supporting dog owners in being more responsible. In addition, it is important to make sure the public understand what the service provided covers and does not cover as well as where to go for accurate and reliable advice. Partner agencies such as the police, the RSPCA and local vets should also be made aware of this.

Policies should give clear guidance to finders of stray dogs (both healthy and sick/injured) on what to do with the dog, both during normal office hours and out of hours, identifying either a suitable reception centre or a collection service.



3 Stray dog service: the basics

Since 2008, local authorities have had sole responsibility for discharging responsibilities for stray dogs. Sections 149 and 150 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Environmental Protection (Stray Dogs) Regulations 1992 set out the provisions and duties of local authorities for seizing and dealing with stray dogs.

Defra usefully produced a guidance booklet¹ on dealing with stray dogs in 2007, which provides some further information. In addition, there is the Animal Welfare Act 2006 – section 9 in particular – for local authorities to be aware of and ensure they comply with when delivering such a service. Again, to support the understanding of the implications of the 2006 legislation, *Codes of Practice on the Welfare of Dogs* were published in England² and Wales³.

Since 2015, microchipping of dogs has been compulsory so the Regulations relating to this in England⁴ and Wales⁵ are also relevant here. Finally, when dealing with the kennelling of seized stray dogs councils should ensure compliance with the relevant legislation and guidance in England^{6,7}, and Wales^{8,9}.

The primary concern of the RSPCA, and the focus of this booklet, is the welfare of any dog taken into care by a local authority. It is important the local authority has a clearly defined, enforceable stray dog policy which, in addition to meeting the requirements of the relevant legislation, has a clear procedure for the proper care of stray dogs.

The delivery of a stray dog service varies from local authority to local authority, particularly in a climate where public spending budgets are continually being reduced. Development of a policy should ensure compliance with the law as well as consider a range of factors, including but not limited to:

- What is the local need? Is there a high demand for such a service (including out-of-hours)? How is this evidenced/measured/monitored?
- Who is best placed to provide it? Will it be in-house or outsourced?
- How can animal welfare be best protected? Is there access to kennels and staff able to deliver this? Collection or delivery service? Do you have access to or a good working relationship with a local vet?

The policy should set out clearly the steps to take from the point where a finder finds a stray dog and the dog is taken in, through to the discharge of responsibility for the dog's welfare following the seven-day period that the local authority must care for them (or when the dog is reunited with his or her owner). This policy does not need to be wordy and complicated, although all the above steps should be covered and clearly detailed.

1 <https://www.bournemouth.gov.uk/communityliving/AnimalsandWildlife/Documents/straydogs-guidance.pdf>

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-the-welfare-of-dogs>

3 <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2017-12/dog-welfare-code-of-practice.pdf>

4 Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015

5 Microchipping of Dogs (Wales) Regulations 2015

6 Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018]

7 <http://www.cfsg.org.uk/The%20Animal%20Welfare%20Licensing%20of%20Activities%20Involvi/f.%20Providing%20Boarding%20for%20Dogs%20Guidance%20Revised%2030.11%20.pdf>

8 Animal Boarding Establishments Act 1963

9 Chartered Institute for Environmental Health Model Licence Conditions and Guidance for Dog Boarding Establishments

Case study:

Pendle Borough Council

Pendle has received the gold award for their stray dog service. They cover an area within Lancashire with a population of around 90,000. They used to have one full-time and one part-time dog warden, who received regular training and attended different seminars to keep their knowledge up to date (although they are currently trialling outsourcing this service to their kennel provider).

Pendle also ensures the details of any dog they seize are accurately recorded on a form and where practicable a photo is also taken of the dog to help reunite dogs with their owners. Dogs are kept in kennels for nine days. The form is used to keep computer records up to date on a monthly basis and the costs of the service can also be effectively monitored.

In Pendle, when collecting a stray dog, officers will:

- Check the local area to try to identify where the dog came from before taking them to the kennels
- Take persistent strays straight to the kennels and notify the owner in writing
- Check for collar and ID tag as well as microchip on the dog to see if an owner can be identified
- Give owners advice on the law and how to prevent straying in future and follow up with a standard letter to reinforce the advice
- Check for illness or injury and take the dog to a contracted vets.

During normal office hours (Monday–Friday 9am–5pm) dogs are collected by the dog wardens. However, the council provides an out-of-hours service suitable for the area. They have a reception centre where members of the public can bring dogs between 5–10pm Monday to Friday and 10am–4pm at weekends and on bank holidays.

These are just some of the basics they provide as part of their service. In addition, they provide a lot more for the local community to encourage responsible dog ownership.

Contact: David Alexander
david.alexander@pendle.gov.uk
01282 661389

Trained staff and appropriate equipment

Training

All staff (whether employed directly by the local authority or sub-contracted out) should be adequately and appropriately trained in the law, dog welfare, behaviour and handling. This ensures a consistent approach and protects both the individual and dogs concerned.

Training should be up to date in terms of the current scientific understanding of dog behaviour, welfare and handling and should cover both the seizure process and while the animal is kennelled. It should contain clear procedures that every new staff member is taught and refresher training for all existing staff. It should also ensure all staff are familiar with, and able to recognise, the signs of illness, injury, poor behaviour and disease in order to spot when a dog needs veterinary attention. With an increasing number of local authority staff having multiple roles/responsibilities this is very important.

Transporting animals

When transporting animals, there is a general duty of care to protect them from injury or unnecessary suffering and to ensure they are transported in suitable containers¹⁰. Any vehicle used for transporting dogs must be suitable for that purpose, with the correct ventilation and temperature control to keep the dog comfortable during the journey whatever the outside temperature (whilst considering individual dog's needs,

e.g. brachycephalic (flat-faced), dogs are prone to heatstroke). Dogs must be securely and comfortably confined during a journey and if a dog is transported alone in a container, they must have enough space to stand, sit erect, lie in a natural position and turn around normally while standing up. Although the RSPCA advises against transporting multiple dogs, if transported with other dogs, there should be sufficient space for all dogs to carry out these behaviours without touching the other dogs.

Equipment

Some dogs may be scared and so it may be necessary to muzzle the dog to ensure their safety as well as that of the handler. Muzzles come in a range of sizes and fit all skull shapes and lengths, so care should be taken to ensure the correct one is selected for the breed/type of dog. Muzzles should be of the 'basket' type – an open mesh that allows the free flow of air. They must be securely fitted to prevent the dog biting but must allow them to pant, drink or vomit safely.

In addition to muzzles bottles of water (and bowls), slip leashes, microchip scanners, dog treats, grasper and a first aid kit should be carried on any vehicle used for collection.

As part of the training programme, staff should be trained in the appropriate use of equipment. For example, slip leashes must not be used in a way that restricts the dog's airway and graspers should only be used as a last resort.

¹⁰ Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order 2006 or Welfare of Animals (Transport) (Wales) Order 2007

Training devices

Punishment-based training has been linked to an increased incidence of behaviour problems in dogs, including fear, anxiety and fear-aggression. Electric shock devices (prohibited in Wales¹¹), choke/check chains, pinch collars, spray collars and other punishment-based methods must not be used when dealing with stray dogs. Reward-based methods should always be used.

Seizure of a stray dog

Consideration should be given to how the dog is seized. The dog should be taken into the care of the local authority in a manner that causes as little distress as possible to the dog while maintaining the safety of local authority staff or local residents. This is why ensuring all staff dealing with stray dogs have adequate training and access to appropriate equipment as set out above is essential.

If you are concerned that a stray dog may be a prohibited type (e.g. a pit bull terrier-type) under section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, you should contact your local police for advice. A dog legislation officer is, in most cases, a specially trained police officer and is one of the few people who can determine whether a dog is a prohibited type or not.

Once the dog has been seized, they should be checked for any injuries or illnesses that need veterinary treatment. Many local authorities have pre-existing arrangements with local vets and if you do not already have one in place you should set one up. This enables local authorities to control costs and should be communicated to any partner agencies, such as the police, RSPCA, etc., so all concerned know where injured or ill stray dogs should be taken. Such arrangements should clearly define authorisation limits and what the local authority will pay for.

Once a stray dog is under the control of a local authority they have a duty under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to ensure his or her welfare and prevent suffering. As part of this, consideration should be given to how an injured or ill dog should be treated out of hours. Any reasonable veterinary costs can be recovered from the owner of the dog and charged prior to the animal's release.

Identifying an owner/ last registered keeper

The aim of any policy and procedure should be to reunite a dog with their owner as soon as possible to minimise kennelling costs and stress for the dog. The local authority officer must check for a collar and tag as well as any microchip when the dog is seized. Compulsory microchipping of dogs has helped local authorities to reunite stray dogs with their owners more easily, however, this only works if the owner of the dog complies with the law and keeps their contact details up to date on the database. Local authorities should be reminded that they can recover costs of enforcement from those who breach the law.

Proactive local authorities seek to reunite owners with dogs using social media and by registering stray dogs with Pets Located (a reunification website), contacting local vets, etc., to help speed up the process. Some local authorities have adopted a policy whereby the first time a dog strays, if the owner can be contacted when the dog is seized, they will be reunited without a charge.

Dead dogs are usually collected by waste management rather than the council dog warden. In some unitary authorities it may be the responsibility of the highways department. In any event, there must be a clear policy and procedure across the different

¹¹ Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars) (Wales) Regulations 2010

departments to scan dead animals for microchips or any other form of identification and notify the owner, where one can be identified as soon as possible. This is considered good practice and has been a requirement for a bronze stray dog PawPrint since the awards were established. It should also be noted that the Highways Agency, in England, is required to scan any dead animals found on major roads and contact owners where practicable.

Kennelling of a stray dog

Following seizure, the dog should be transferred to the local authority kennels or reception centre (whether provided in-house or by a third party) as soon as is practicable, if no owner can be found immediately and the dog does not need veterinary treatment. The stray dog kennels or reception centre should, if provided by a third party – as a minimum – be licensed under the relevant legislation and comply with the relevant guidance in England¹² and Wales¹³ as well as comply with the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

It is likely that dogs seized and kennelled by enforcement bodies, even for short periods of time, find it difficult to cope with kennel life and, for some, this means their welfare will be compromised. It is therefore important (and a legal requirement) that seizing authorities and kennels do all they can to provide for the dogs' welfare needs.

Good welfare can make good business sense. Ensuring the welfare of seized dogs in a kennel environment not only benefits the individual dogs and kennel staff but can also, potentially, save money as less is spent, for example, on veterinary treatment. Further information on good and best practice for seized dogs in a kennel environment can be found in an RSPCA guide¹⁴ and, starting in 2019, we have a separate PawPrint award for seized dog welfare. The guide has been

written to help kennels and seizing bodies provide for dogs' welfare needs and to assist in the care and management of all seized dogs, whether long or short term. While we recognise some of the guidance may be more difficult to implement in certain areas or under certain conditions, all kennels and contracting bodies should ensure they meet the minimum legal requirements and aim to improve their standards in line with the guidance.

When a stray dog is 'checked in' to a kennels or reception centre there should be a transfer document that clearly records the dog's condition when seized and if they were transferred following medical treatment. Any ongoing veterinary advice must be adhered to. This paper trail is essential should any issues arise at a later date.

It is a requirement of the bronze stray dog PawPrint that the kennels or reception centre is staffed out of hours. Following the devastating fire at Manchester Dogs Home in 2014, the reasons for this are clear. Full consideration should be given to how the kennels housing the seized dogs that are the responsibility of the council will be evacuated should an emergency occur. The PawPrints contingency planning and animal welfare guide suggests that local authorities work with boarding establishments and contains working examples of how councils have done this.

¹² Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018

¹³ Boarding Establishments Act 1963

¹⁴ RSPCA guide to good practice for the welfare of seized dogs in kennels

Case study:

South Wales Police

Although this case study concerns dogs in slightly different circumstances to straying the principles remain very relevant: ensuring good management procedures are in place and the welfare of the animals is monitored at all times.

South Wales Police worked hard to implement procedures to ensure they improved the welfare of seized dogs by substantially reducing their time in kennels. Having a full-time officer made a significant difference as they could manage and monitor the dogs from the point of seizure through to conclusion of investigation and/or court case. Being kept in kennels can be a stressful experience for dogs, so procedures that can help prevent this can improve animal welfare and reduce costs for the seizing body. While local authorities are only legally obliged to keep dogs for seven days, welfare can still be compromised during that time if the correct policies and procedures are not in place.

Contact: PC Walter Pennell

walter.pennell@south-wales.pnn.police.uk

01656 869396



Reuniting a stray dog with their owner or other disposal of a stray dog

The local authority should make every attempt to find the original owner of the dog and afford them a reasonable amount of time in which to collect him or her. It is accepted practice by the majority of local authorities that all dogs should be microchipped before being reunited with their owner (costs of such a service can be included within any fee charged). The local authority should also ensure that, where a finder wishes to keep the dog, they are a fit and proper person and able to provide for the welfare needs of the animal under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Additionally, the finder should be informed verbally and in writing that they must keep the dog for at least a month if the owner fails to reclaim them and that failure to do so is a criminal offence^{15, 16}.

The statutory responsibility for the dog rests with the local authority for a period of seven days, after which the council can dispose of the dog by sale, gift or, sadly, euthanasia. Euthanasia must be performed humanely, i.e. carried out by or under the direction of a veterinary surgeon. The aim should always be to rehome the dog where it is appropriate to do so, however, when a dog is deemed unsuitable for rehoming for health or behavioural reasons, the decision should be made as early as possible to ensure animal welfare (and must involve the appropriate experts and relevant bodies).

Where dogs are reunited with their owners the owners should be provided with guidance on how best to prevent their pet from straying in the future, as well as the legal requirement to microchip their pet and keep contact details up to date. Many local authorities have developed leaflets and advice on steps that can be taken to prevent repeat straying, for example: mending broken fences; considering (in consultation with a vet) whether neutering might be helpful; or if the advice of a qualified behaviour expert should be sought. It is too early to identify if issuing Community Protection Notices (CPNs)¹⁷ is effective in compelling owners of dogs that persistently stray to take necessary preventative steps, however, it is worth considering doing this, if only as a method of last resort.

Case study:

Charnwood Borough Council

In 2016 Charnwood produced new guidance to improve the safety and welfare of both dogs and owners involved in rehoming animals from the council's kennels.

This collaborative new booklet, produced jointly by the council, the kennel provider and working with other councils in the area, explains the rehoming process in an easy-to-follow way from the dog's point of view, identifying potential problems and explaining simply why they might happen and what can be done about them. This booklet is not unique, but the advice, the style and the presentation all represent best practice that can be achieved relatively simply and at little or no cost.

Contact: Nicky Gibson
Nicola.gibson@charnwood.gov.uk
01509 634576

¹⁵ s150(1) and (3) Environmental Protection Act 1990

¹⁶ s4(5) Environmental Protection (Stray Dog) Regulations 1992

¹⁷ Under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014

Effective record keeping

The records kept by a local authority should follow a prescribed format according to the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and cover certain aspects as set out in the Environmental Protection (Stray Dogs) Regulations 1992.

The local authority is responsible for ensuring the records are kept, even if the service is outsourced. In addition to record keeping being a legal requirement, the records are a helpful tool in collating statistics and identifying trends so the council can better direct limited resources.



4 Stray dog policy: going beyond the basics

The provision of a stray dog service that is effective is essential if the local authority is to ensure the health and welfare of residents and animals in their area. Importantly, by providing a proactive service that educates and raises awareness about responsible dog ownership, the problems resulting from stray dogs can be tackled more effectively before they take hold or cost the council significant sums of money.

Regular proactive work to encourage responsible dog ownership

Proactive work can help to reduce the number of complaints a council may receive about dogs in their community, for example noise complaints about barking dogs, etc. Educating residents and encouraging them to be responsible dog owners can help improve animal welfare and reduce costs for local authorities. Local authorities participating in the stray dogs PawPrint have developed a variety of ways to deliver fun and engaging community events – from big extravaganzas to small events at schools to help dog owners understand what they need to do to be responsible.

Social media, leaflets at events and greater public access through local authority websites all offer effective ways of engaging with local residents as well. Pages on a council's website dedicated to animal welfare can encourage owners to neuter their pets and set out legal requirements, such as having their dogs microchipped, or making owners aware of their duty of care under section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.



Case study:

Dacorum Borough Council

Dacorum Borough Council has been recognised for effectively engaging with the community on irresponsible dog ownership, using innovative statistical mapping to identify target areas for specific engagement where issues involving dogs were a particular problem.

This included multi-agency communication and events offering a range of dog welfare services of benefit to the animals involved, their owners and the wider community, resulting in targeted support for the dog owners who most needed it and a corresponding impact on the welfare of the dogs involved.

Contact: dogwarden@dacorum.gov.uk



Provision of an out-of-hours service

While the current financial climate makes it increasingly difficult to provide an out-of-hours service, local authorities should still provide one that meets the needs of the local community to ensure good animal welfare. This should include evening and weekend/bank holiday provision where dogs can be collected or delivered to the kennels or reception centre either by the local authority or members of the public.

Some local authorities are able and need to provide a comprehensive out-of-hours collection service (although this is becoming increasingly rare), while others have developed solutions that meet the needs of the residents and stray dogs in their area.

Rehoming policy

There should be a clear rehoming policy that ensures all rehomed dogs are assessed behaviourally and physically, are microchipped and that potential new owners are vetted. Providing new owners with advice and information to help them meet the welfare needs of their dog is also encouraged. Where a council uses a contracted or third-party kennels after the statutory seven-day period, it should still apply this approach. This will reduce the likelihood of dogs being returned to the kennels, as well as helping to prevent any dog bite incidents thus reducing the cost of dealing with stray dogs.

5 The RSPCA: a resource for stray dog service providers

The RSPCA is the largest, oldest and best-known animal welfare organisation in the world. There is a wealth of knowledge and experience available for you to access.

As a charity, the RSPCA relies on the support of public donations for the animal welfare service it provides.

RSPCA 24-hour cruelty line: 0300 1234 999 (for members of the public)

The RSPCA has a dedicated line for reporting cruelty and welfare concerns that operates 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

Our website offers non-emergency advice and welfare information: www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets

Cruelty and welfare concerns can also be reported online: www.rspca.org.uk/utilities/contactus/reportcruelty

For more information please contact:

England: politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk

Wales: externalaffairscymru@rspca.org.uk



Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Wilberforce Way, Southwater, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 9RS 0300 1234 999 www.rspca.org.uk

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