

**MINUTES OF THE ANIMAL WELFARE VISITING SCHEME**

**HELD BOTH IN PERSON AND REMOTELY ON TEAMS**

**18th AUGUST 2025 at 6:00 PM**

**PRESENT:** Stephen Lewis– Chair, Animal Welfare Visitor – (SL)

Kirsty Buckland – Animal Welfare Visitor (KB)

David Davies - Sergeant - Roads Policing Specialist, Operations (DD)

Louise Crawford – Dogs Trust

Inspector Emma Smith - RSPCA

Nicola Warren - Scheme Administrator, OPCC (NW)

Ceri Hiscox – Assistant Scheme Administrator, OPCC (CH)

**The meeting commenced at 6:02pm.**

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|  | **Notes and Actions** | **Action** |
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| **1.** | **Apologies** |  |
|  | Apologies for absence were received from Inspector Jeffrey Smith, Helen Lawless, Andrew Watkins, Sarah Fowler and Vikki Waite. |  |
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| **2.** | **Minutes and Actions from Previous Meetings** |  |
|  | The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.  DD reported that 10 out of the 12 kennel checks had been completed. It was anticipated that the remaining two would be finalised within the next couple of weeks. DD confirmed that all completed paperwork would be forwarded to NW, and the outstanding checks would be followed up accordingly DD.  **Action 2 -** DD confirmed that a drugs, cash, and firearms initial training course for specialist dogs was scheduled to commence on 22 September and would run for ten weeks Monday to Thursday 07:00 to 15:00. DD explained that the initial phase of the upcoming specialist dog training course would focus on introducing the dogs to basic training methods, while the latter part of the ten-week programme would be more scenario-based as the dogs developed their operational skills.  Visitors would be able to choose which stage of the course they preferred to observe, depending on their interest in either foundational techniques or practical applications.  DD requested that the available dates be circulated to visitors to determine their availability for attending and confirmed he would coordinate accordingly once responses were received.  General-purpose dog training was currently being delivered ad hoc during shifts, with no formal courses scheduled. A recent Firearms Search Dog refresher had taken place, though its format did not allow for visitor attendance.  DD to provide updates should any general-purpose training be formally booked, allowing visitors the opportunity to observe the larger dogs in training.  **Action 3 -** It was agreed that circulating the mobile contact numbers of the dog handlers would assist with coordination. However, one handler’s contact details were still outstanding and would need to be followed up.  **Action 3 -** NW reported having spoken with the Scheme Manager in South Wales Commissioner’s office, who confirmed that while several of the issues raised had been addressed at Waterton, some remained outstanding. It was indicated that discussions were ongoing regarding a potential move to new premises, which may be influencing decisions about further updates to the current site. NW noted uncertainty about the extent to which continued investment in the existing location was being considered and asked whether LC and DD had any further information regarding the relocation plans.  LC confirmed that new premises were planned to be built on the existing plot of land, although construction had not yet commenced. It was hoped that building work would begin next year, pending formal confirmation. In the meantime, several recommended changes had already been implemented, and the current site was considered fit for purpose.  An update was provided on improvements to the exercise field, including the addition of new equipment such as rubber tyres. It was noted that the new build was expected to be located where the firearms section currently sits. The group agreed to close the matter for now, with NW to notify relevant parties should any further updates regarding the redevelopment become available.  **Action 3 -** PD Chip was discussed in relation to a previous health concern identified as “cherry eye,” observed during a kennel visit in February. DD confirmed that he had not received an update regarding Chip’s current medical status and would need to review veterinary records before providing further information.  It was clarified that Chip remained a potential police dog and had not yet completed training. He was scheduled to attend the upcoming drugs, cash, and firearms initial course beginning in September.  Chip’s progress and suitability for operational duties would be assessed during the ten-week programme.  **Action 3 -** NW confirmed that the Scheme Manager in SW had spoken with the Kennel Manager and was assured that all dogs were being walked.  **Action 4 -** ES raised a query regarding breeder licensing. It was confirmed that the breeder in question was a registered and licensed provider. DD was asked to follow up with a formal update.  **Action 4 -** SL reported that during his visit in August, he observed one of the newly issued animal first aid kits in use by the handler. The kit was described as very comprehensive and well-received, with positive feedback from the handler. SL confirmed that the contents had been reviewed and that the branding had been finalised.  KB also confirmed having seen one of the kits during her visit earlier in the month and expressed that she was equally impressed with its quality and completeness. The group welcomed the update and noted satisfaction that the kits had now been distributed.  DD confirmed that all handlers had completed the specialist first aid course for dogs and had been issued both vehicle-based and personal leg kits. This provision was now fully in place.  DD confirmed that while all dogs currently had access to protective boots, the main issue remained keeping them securely on the dogs’ feet, particularly during public safety unit deployments. The boots were functional but not ideal, and alternative suppliers were being explored to improve fit and durability.  LC raised a query regarding the provision of personal first aid kits for handlers, seeking confirmation that kits were not limited to vehicles. DD confirmed that each handler had been issued both vehicle-based and personal kits, addressing the concern.  **Action 5 -** DD reported that the new training model had been released but remained subject to change, with several details yet to be confirmed. It was understood that the training function would transfer to the Operational Training Unit, where instructors would deliver skills training across the police service.  DD’s current role was due to be phased out, with no dedicated Dog Sergeant position retained. Instead, a Training Manager within the Operational Training Unit would oversee training, while operational responsibilities would be managed by Roads Police Specialist Operations Sergeants.  The Sergeant overseeing this transition was expected to take up post at the beginning of October. However, it was not yet clear where the Animal Welfare Scheme would sit within the new structure. NW agreed to follow up seek clarification and ensure final arrangements were confirmed. | **DD**  **NW/CH**  **DD**  **DD**  **DD**  **NW** |
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| **3.** | **Scheme Update** |  |
|  | NW confirmed there were six members on the scheme along with two representatives from the Dogs Trust and the RSPCA.  It was agreed that priority should be given to a dog that had not been seen since 24th February. DD confirmed this was PD Maze, whose handler had been on long-term sick leave followed by a basic training course. The handler had since returned to operational duties, and it was anticipated that PD Maze could be visited in the coming weeks.  DD stated he would review the rota once details of the next visit were confirmed and would ensure efforts were made to include PD Maze. It was noted that the August visit had already taken place, with the next scheduled for September. Several other dogs were also unavailable due to training commitments or pending operational status.  DD confirmed that four dogs were scheduled to attend the drugs course in September. All other dogs were reported to be fully licensed.  NW thanked the visitors and PC Higgins who had attended a recent visit with /the Police and Crime Commissioner to promote the scheme. Feedback from the Commissioner was positive.  NW praised the handler for his enthusiasm and professionalism during the recent visit, with attendees noting he came across exceptionally well.  DD confirmed that PD Cali had recently had pups, which had initially caused some confusion. This news had come as a surprise to the team. Cali was being cared for by the force until she was fit to attend a training course.  LC advised that the pups were rehomed, and Cali was confirmed to be back in operational condition, ready to attend the course.  DD confirmed this was the first known instance of an unexpected litter within Gwent Police, although it may have occurred in other forces. The incident was noted as unprecedented for the team.  NW reported an issue of confirming dates and availability for future meetings. The previous meeting had been cancelled due to low attendance, with several members unavailable. CH had circulated an email to check availability, and although most had responded, four individuals were still outstanding. Attendees were reminded of the importance of confirming and committing to dates once availability was given.  DD explained there was a formal policy in place regarding the euthanasia of dogs, which applied only in extreme circumstances. A healthy dog would not be euthanised unless it could not be safely rehomed, and only after all other options had been exhausted.  The policy detailed the process and required sign-off at a senior level. The policy served as a safeguard, ensuring appropriate checks and balances were followed.  NW informed the visitors she had been made aware of a report from a Health and Safety meeting indicating that a police dog had bitten a member of the public in February. The dog and its handler had since retired.  DD clarified that the incident involving a police dog biting a member of the public occurred while the dog was off duty and being exercised in a private field. The individual had been near a farm gate and was not expected to be present. DD confirmed that the incident was reported through the bite or near-miss procedure, which mirrors the standard bite reporting process. The report was assessed, and the outcome was documented in both the system and the dog’s file. Following Health and Safety’s involvement, a copy of the original report was provided to them. A review was conducted, resulting in a few follow-up actions.  NW noted that such updates were usually shared during panel meetings and expressed concern that no notification had been received in this instance. DD suspected the delay may have been due to late reporting to Health and Safety.  DD confirmed that decisions followed the established policy and were treated as operational matters. Once actioned, updates were provided to the Animal Welfare Scheme Manager. DD to confirm the protocol was in place. | **DD** |
| **4.** | **Operational Update from the Dog Section** |  |
|  | DD confirmed that most updates had already been covered in earlier discussions. He reported that 10 out of 12 kennel inspections had been completed and that all staff had been issued with first aid kits. A recruitment process had been undertaken, with assessments carried out by Avon and Somerset Police due to internal resource limitations.  As a result, one officer had been selected to start as a new dog handler. She was scheduled to begin the GP Basic Course in September with Avon and Somerset, who would also be supplying the dog.  DD reported that the new handler and dog were expected to be operational within 12 weeks. Four dogs were currently on course, and preparations were underway to source a new GP dog for one handler, who had returned to shift duties following his role as a central instructor. Additionally, a handler was being considered for an explosives dog course with South Wales Police, who would supply the dog. The course was scheduled for September.  DD shared recent operational successes involving new dogs. PD Danny successfully tracked and detained two individuals who had fled from a vehicle.  PD Max tracked a burglary suspect over a kilometre through varied terrain in Blaenau Gwent, locating and arresting the individual. PD Jack responded to a crash in Blaenau Gwent, arriving 25 minutes later and successfully tracking and arresting the suspect. PD Neo tracked and detained a male wanted for multiple offences after he fled from officers. DD noted that the new dogs had delivered excellent results and concluded his update.  KB enquired whether there was an opportunity for a dog to be trialled by the team, as she was aware of a potentially suitable dog in need of rehoming. DD confirmed that this was an option and explained that the handler was currently undergoing training and would later progress to the drugs, cash, and firearms course. A new GP dog would likely be considered around Christmas. DD welcomed the suggestion of a gift or rescue dog and asked KB to forward the details so the dog could be assessed if still available at the appropriate time.  KB asked whether a recent visit had been cancelled due to operational priorities.  DD confirmed that the reason for the initial visit cancellation was not known, as it had been an operational matter between the handler and his shift sergeant. However, DD expressed relief that the situation had been resolved positively, noting that a visit had been rearranged and the handler attended on his rest day, preventing further delays.  Following the incident, DD issued an email to all handlers reminding them of the importance of scheduled visits. He instructed that, in the event of a cancellation, handlers should make every effort to reschedule either personally or through a colleague. This measure was intended to prevent similar issues from arising in future.  KB raised a concern regarding public backlash faced by another Police force following the euthanasia of a dog that had been denied an operation. She queried whether feedback or supporting evidence was provided in such cases to explain the rationale behind euthanasia decisions.  KB suggested that, where possible, it would be helpful to receive information in advance regarding any potential euthanasia decisions.  KB referred to the report from another Police force which suggested that a dog may have been euthanised unnecessarily and asked whether the current policy could be reviewed to understand the rationale behind such decisions. DD confirmed that the policy was available for review and noted that the Scheme Manager had previously seen a version submitted for consultation and ratification, which was undergoing further amendments. He stated that the euthanasia section remained unchanged and offered to share it for reference.  DD emphasised that all euthanasia decisions within their force were veterinary-led and based on operational safety considerations. He clarified that such decisions were never made to reduce costs and reiterated the importance of transparency and adherence to policy.  It was noted that this meeting was originally scheduled for July had been moved to August and would now be rescheduled for 5th November. DD confirmed that he would be retiring around the beginning of November. He suggested that if a meeting could be arranged before his departure, it would be beneficial, particularly as Inspector Smith was expected to attend.  It was agreed that the next meeting would be rescheduled to 3rd November. DD confirmed that the new Sergeant would be PS Geraint Hopkins. Inspector Smith would provide further clarification regarding the division of responsibilities and confirm the identity of the nominated officer, which had not yet been finalised. Attendees noted the importance of having a single Sergeant representative, rather than coordinating across multiple sections, to ensure consistency and clarity in communication. It was confirmed that PS Rees would attend future meetings once responsibilities were established. The meeting concluded with thanks to all participants and confirmation of the new date. |  |
| **5.** | **AOB** |  |
|  | No other business was discussed. |  |
|  | **Date of Next Meeting** |  |
|  | The next meeting will be held at **6pm, on 22nd October 2025.** |  |

**Meeting concluded at 6:47pm**

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| **Jane Mudd, Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent** | |
| **I confirm that I have considered whether or not I have any personal or prejudicial interest in this matter and take the proposed decision in compliance with my code of conduct. Any such interests are recorded below.**  **The above request has my approval.** | |
| **Signed** | **Date**  **07.10.2025** |

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| **Contact Officer** |  |
| **Name** | **Nicola Warren** |
| **Position** | **Governance Officer** |
| **Telephone** | **01633 642200** |
| **Email** | **Nicola.Warren@gwent.police.uk** |
| **Background papers** |  |

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| **Actions from Meeting dated 18th August 2025** | |  |  |  |
| **Minute Number** | **Action** | **Owner** | **Update** |  |
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| **2.** | The Sergeant overseeing this transition was expected to take up post at the beginning of October. However, it was not yet clear where the Animal Welfare Scheme would sit within the new structure. NW agreed to follow up seeking clarification and ensure final arrangements were confirmed. | **NW** |  |  |
| **3.** | DD confirmed that decisions followed the established policy and were treated as operational matters. Once actioned, updates were provided to the Animal Welfare Scheme Manager. DD to confirm the protocol was in place. | **DD** |  |  |
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| **Actions from Meeting dated 28th April 2025** | | |  |  |  |
| **3.** | NW informed the meeting that the visitor 3-year reviews have been completed, feedback from the visitors had been positive, and all minor issues had been addressed. One request was for the dog handlers’ work mobile numbers to be circulated. DD to send an updated list to CH for circulation. | **DD** |  | **Outstanding** |
| **3.** | Dog handlers’ work mobile numbers to be circulated. One handler remains outstanding. DD to provide number to CH. |  |  | **Outstanding** |
| **4.** | ES raised concern about whether the breeder was a licensed, registered breeder and governed by the local authority. To ensure the breeder was not breaking licensing laws, DD would follow up. | **DD** |  | **Outstanding** |
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