



MINUTES OF THE ANIMAL WELFARE VISITING SCHEME
HELD BOTH IN PERSON AND REMOTELY ON TEAMS
22nd OCTOBER 2025 at 6:00 PM

PRESENT: Stephen Lewis – Chair, Animal Welfare Visitor – (SL)
Helen Lawless – Animal Welfare Visitor (HL)
Andrew Watkins – Animal Welfare Visitor (AW)
David Davies - Sergeant - Roads Policing Specialist, Operations (DD)
Nicola Warren - Scheme Administrator, OPCC (NW)
Ceri Hiscox – Assistant Scheme Administrator, OPCC (CH)

The meeting commenced at 6:12pm.

	Notes and Actions	Action
1.	Apologies	
	Apologies for absence were received from Inspector Jeffrey Smith, Sarah Fowler, Kirsty Buckland, Vikki Waite, Louise Crawford – Dogs Trust and Inspector Emma Smith – RSPCA.	
2.	Minutes and Actions from Previous Meetings	
	The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.	
3.	Scheme Update	
	NW confirmed there were 6 members on the scheme along with a representative from the Dogs Trust and the RSPCA. There had been no issues with covering visits at present so it was agreed that this number would be maintained with this arrangement reviewed if any issues arise in the future. NW informed the meeting there were 6 out of 21 dogs currently awaiting visits. One dog is not yet operational and will be prioritised for a visit in due course. There were 3 dogs that had not been seen in the past year, and these should be prioritised according to the dogs-to-be-seen list. All other police dogs had been visited within the past year.	

	NW confirmed there had been no major issues of concern raised. NW asked if there was a possibility of having stab vests for police dogs. They noted that the topic had surfaced recently following communication from other forces, who had been benchmarking and enquiring about current practices. DD confirmed that there was a mixed approach nationally, with some forces issuing stab vests and others not. DD stated that Gwent only issue stab vests to dogs attending firearms operations. DD confirmed that while certain products had been trialled, they had never been formally issued. DD confirmed an Inspector, had investigated the matter a few years ago which could be revisited to assess the current position. He acknowledged that the matter could be expensive and reiterated that this might be a contributing factor to the lack of implementation. GH to follow up. He also stated that the vests might be quite bulky and questioned whether the design could hinder the dogs' movement or performance. DD suggested that the issue was likely a balance between safety and operational effectiveness. DD confirmed that, as part of the new Authorised Professional Practice (APP) and welfare procedures, all dogs would be weighed and the data stored within their individual dog files. These files were currently maintained on an inhouse system. DD noted that there had been discussion about whether access to the files could be granted for specific purposes or whether updates could be provided monthly via a spreadsheet to the OPCC. GH to share spreadsheet monthly. NW confirmed that a new rota had been completed and circulated to the visitors. NW and the entire panel thanked DD for his unwavering support and dedication over the years. His contributions have been invaluable. The panel wished DD a happy healthy retirement. DD informed the meeting that Sergeant Geraint Hopkins would take over his role and attend future meetings.	GH GH
4.	Terms of reference	
	NW clarified that the Terms of Reference (ToR) document related to the structure of the meeting and the expectations of those involved. NW asked whether everyone was happy with the current version and if there were any proposed changes. It was confirmed that the document had not changed, and no amendments were suggested. NW asked whether attendees were satisfied with how the scheme was running or if there were any additional considerations to include.	

	They noted that one of the previous actions had involved reviewing the ToR to ensure alignment with best practice and to facilitate sharing in relation to an incident discussed at the last meeting involving a member of the public. DD expressed uncertainty about the remit of the scheme in terms of updating others about bite incidents, questioning whether this fell outside the welfare scope and instead related to the training of the dog, which might not be covered under the current framework. NW explained that their perspective was rooted in welfare considerations, both for the dog and for members of the public. DD noted that the situation was complex and highlighted an overlap between welfare and operational training responsibilities. They acknowledged limitations in the facilities available for exercising dogs while confirming that no formal facilities were currently in place. DD concluded by questioning whether the scheme should be updated when a dog was involved in a bite incident, whether the individual affected was a member of the public or a suspect, and stated that the matter remained unclear. The matter was left open for further clarification. NW to follow this up. DD noted that off-duty dog walking presented a welfare concern, particularly if officers were required to keep dogs on a lead or long line at all times. They emphasised the importance of allowing dogs downtime to behave naturally, such as engaging in scent work, which was essential for their wellbeing. NW asked whether there were any suitable areas within the force estate that could be recommended for this purpose. They confirmed that the matter was under discussion and aligned with the APP. DD explained that questions had been raised regarding the size of the area required. For training purposes, a space the size of a tennis court might suffice, although larger areas were needed for full training exercises. For walking and welfare, the requirement was less extensive. They questioned whether a centralised area could be made available that officers could access while on duty. GH to raise with the head of department. It was acknowledged that it was a challenge with officers being spread across the county and noted that many had made independent arrangements with local farmers to access suitable land.	NW GH
5.	Operational Update from the Dog Section	
	DD confirmed that 2 necessary handler home checks had not yet been completed. 1 of the handlers did not have a dog at the time, so the check would need to be repeated. The purpose was to ensure that the garden was suitable. GH to complete. Updates were provided regarding the General-Purpose course. It was confirmed that the course discussed at the last meeting had been completed.	GH

There had been some confusion about whether the dates had been circulated to allow volunteers to attend.

DD confirmed that all 4 new dogs had become operational. Unfortunately, Police Dog (PD) Denni became lame after only being operational for a few weeks. He was taken to the vet where he was subsequently diagnosed with hip dysplasia. The prognosis indicated that the dog could have continued working for another twelve months, but the condition would have deteriorated significantly, requiring medical retirement. The decision was therefore taken, based on the welfare of the dog, not to accelerate the issue and worsen it over the following year. It was agreed that the dog should be medically retired immediately, as although the hip dysplasia would remain, the impact would be reduced, allowing for a happier retirement.

Following this decision, PD Denni was returned to the breeder and trainer from whom he had originally been obtained. DD informed the meeting that in the next 3 to 6 months there might be a requirement for another dog and handler, potentially another German Shepherd, depending on operational need.

DD advised that PDs Chip, Chase, Reggie, and Calli were currently undertaking a drugs / cash course. This course had started in September and was due to finish in the last week of November.

It was noted that, as discussed at the previous meeting, if the visitors wished to visit the dogs during the course, certain parts of the programme would be more suitable than others. The dogs had already completed the initial intensive stage, and it was agreed that there would now be more opportunities for visitors to attend. It was requested that the best days for visits be identified so that this information could be circulated.

DD confirmed that Police Sergeant (PS) Hopkins was now in post and was responsible for the training. It was agreed he could be contacted to co-ordinate with the instructor to arrange suitable visiting opportunities over the five weeks remaining of the course.

DD advised that discussions had taken place regarding the introduction of a new explosives dog to commence a course in September in South Wales. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, this did not happen, and no additional explosives dog had yet been introduced. One of the handlers had attached himself to that course to complete an instructor's qualification. It was confirmed that the handler would return within the next few weeks and would then be licensed to instruct explosives dogs.

DD informed the meeting of several positive outcomes that had been highlighted relating to operational work. One of the new dogs, together with PC Edwards, had successfully located a vulnerable missing person. The track began at a bus stop, continued through trees into a woodland, and resulted in the individual being found safe and well.

	A handler attended a burglary involving a stolen vehicle. The vehicle was sighted by Roads Policing Specialist Operations (RPSO) and following a pursuit and decamp, a suspect fled into the playing fields. PD Keila searched the area and located a female hiding in bushes, resulting in another successful outcome. A further case involved a suicidal female reported missing. The handler and PD Hades conducted inquiries which narrowed the location to a large, wooded area. Hades searched the area and found the female safe and well, this was considered a strong result. The meeting agreed that operational outcomes had been positive and noted the importance of recording these successes.	
6.	AOB	
	DD informed the meeting that when handlers go on holiday, retired dogs had traditionally been kennelled under the same arrangements as their current dogs. He advised that this practice could potentially be stopped by South Wales Police although it was still under review. Concerns were raised that changes to this arrangement could create issues for handlers, as some had retired dogs with additional needs as a result of their operational duties. It was emphasised that this posed a risk, as when signing the dog order as a new owner, the last thing anyone wanted was for a dog to be placed with someone who initially appeared suitable but later decided the responsibility was too much. It was explained that in such cases, dogs could end up in unsuitable circumstances. It was confirmed that in such cases, the handler would take possession of the dog or arrange for its placement. It was noted that all handlers had taken retired dogs on this basis, with the understanding that the force would continue to pay for kennelling. NW confirmed that the matter would be raised with the Commissioner. The issue was that if handlers did not keep retired dogs, responsibility would return to the force to decide what to do with them. It was agreed that retiring a dog to its handler was still the best option, as handlers were better equipped with the necessary knowledge and experience.	NW
	Date of Next Meeting	
	The next meeting will be held at 6pm, 21st January 2026.	

Meeting concluded at 7:05pm

Jane Mudd Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent	
My decision is as I have recorded in this paper	
Signed 	Date 04.08.2026

Contact Officer	
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Background papers	

