

Dangerous Dogs Team
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Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you on behalf of 4Children with regards to the issue of responsible dog ownership, with specific reference to those classified as “prohibited types” under Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act, in light of Defra’s recent proposals regarding this issue.

4Children is the national charity all about children and families. We have spearheaded a joined-up, integrated approach to children’s services and work with a wide range of partners around the country to ensure children and families have access to the services and support they need in their local communities. We run Sure Start Children’s Centres as well as family and youth services across Britain.

We develop, influence and shape national policy on all aspects of the lives of children, young people and families. As the Government’s strategic partner for early years and childcare we have a crucial role in co-producing policy with the Department of Education and representing the sector’s views and experiences. Our national campaigns, like Give Me Strength, change policy and practice and put the needs of children and families on the political and policy agenda.

With regards to the proposal of compulsory microchipping in England for all dogs, it is our view that this suggestion by Defra will serve to extend the realm of responsibility for dog-owners by expanding the 3.9 million dogs currently microchipped to the estimated dog population of 6.7 million. Given that charities such as *Dogs Trust* already provide free microchipping to pensioners and those on benefits, we believe that such chipping should be mandatory, in order to hold reckless dog owners to account.

4Children is strongly in favour of Defra’s suggestion to expand section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 into the private sphere. It is our belief that an attack on a child or adult by a dangerous animal is inexcusable, regardless of where it takes place. The number of dog attacks has risen from 2,915 in 1998/9 to a startling 6,118 in 2010/11, with the majority happening in the private sphere, whether or not the dog is attacking a resident of the property. Although a distinction must be made between attacks in self- defense or against intruders, the overwhelming number of violent attacks clearly indicates a need for a restructuring of current relevant laws.

We do not believe, however, that the Defra consultation adequately gets to grips with the threat dangerous dogs pose – particularly to vulnerable people and children, and believe that a number of additional steps should be taken to ensure that dangerous dogs are appropriately dealt with.

Firstly, the government should introduce guidance for local authorities, and other providers of services for dangerous dogs, to ensure they meet a minimum of provision which is necessary for ensuring community safety. This guidance should require local authorities to:

- Operate a 24 hour dangerous dog service, to ensure that reports about dangerous dogs can be responded to quickly, and vulnerable people are not left exposed to dangerous dogs over nights or weekends;
- Provide improved training for legal practitioners who interact with dangerous dogs and their owners – including providing additional support to named contacts in local police forces and the Crown Prosecution Service, to ensure that they are prepared to deal with the legal complexities of owners of dangerous dogs, as they arise; and
- Ensure local residents and business owners are kept well informed of the legal position in regard to dangerous dogs, how someone threatened or concerned about a dangerous dog should proceed, and what steps are being taken to ensure that local dogs are dealt with effectively.

The government should also consider introducing targets to police forces in order to increase the number of scans of potentially dangerous dogs which are undertaken. There is little point in micro-chipping dogs across the country if the current situation persists of police officers making very little use of the scanning equipment available – and indeed, many lacking training in its use. A pro-active approach to identifying dangerous dogs, or those who have not been micro-chipped would allow intervention **before** tragedy strikes, rather than after – and would extend the protection the police provide to local communities more effectively.

Many thanks for your consideration, and please do get in contact if you would like to discuss any of these issues further.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Bennett
Director of Public Affairs, 4Children