



**Cheshire
Police & Crime
Commissioner**



**SWYDDFA COMISIYNYDD HEDDLU
A THROSEDD GOGLEDD CYMRU**
**OFFICE OF THE POLICE & CRIME
COMMISSIONER NORTH WALES**

Cheshire & North Wales Police Dog Welfare Scheme

Annual Report 2024/25

Introduction

1. In 1997, the death of police dog 'Acer' whilst training in Essex, as well as the subsequent prosecution of police officers involved, resulted in an understandable loss of public confidence in relation to police dog training methods. A subsequent review of all police dog training methods and handling launched by the Association of Chief Police Officers led to the introduction of Animal Welfare Lay Visitors Schemes.
2. The Scheme with Cheshire was established in 2002 but following the amalgamation of the Cheshire and North Wales Police Dog Units in 2016, forming the Alliance Policing Dog Section, the Scheme is now a joint Cheshire and North Wales Police Dog Welfare Scheme.
3. Police dogs within Cheshire and North Wales vary in sex, age and breed. The alliance has a mix of tactical/general purpose police dogs, as well as dedicated specialist dogs.
4. The strategic aim of the Scheme is to maintain public confidence and safeguard the welfare of all police dogs by ensuring that police dog training methods and the operational use of police dogs are ethical, humane, transparent and accountable. The Scheme operates alongside the annual inspection of all dogs undertaken by a Veterinary Surgeon and the inspection of the kennels located at the handler's home by the Police Dogs Unit Sergeant.

Annual Report 2024/25

5. This Annual Report captures details of the work of the Cheshire & North Wales Police Dog Welfare Scheme from 01 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 and includes information in relation to visits undertaken throughout the year.

Operation of the Scheme

6. Police Dog Welfare Visitors are exclusively members of the local community, who volunteer to observe, comment and report on the conditions in which the police dogs are housed, trained and transported whilst on duty. To maintain the scheme's independence and avoid any conflict of interest, all visitors have no direct involvement with Cheshire or North Wales Police Forces. They are not allowed to be a serving or retired police officers, member of police staff, Community Support Officers, Special Constable or Magistrate.
7. Visitors carry out an inspection of all police dogs within the Dog Unit which has a mix of General-Purpose Police Dogs which are deployed for searching, tracking, arrest work and crowd control. A number of these dogs are trained to work with firearms officers. The Dog Unit also have dogs that specialise in detecting drugs, cash, guns, weapons, explosives, electronic media and seminal fluids.
8. The visitors ensure compliance with the RSPCA's 'Five Freedoms' or 'Five Needs' on which the Animal Welfare Act 2006 is based, and a report is completed for each dog observed. The visitors also take account of the Codes of Practice for [England](#) and [Wales](#) categorisations when visiting the kennels. Any issues or concerns raised by the visitors are brought to the attention of the Dogs Unit Supervisor via the Commissioners' offices. The Scheme Administrator is kept informed of any action taken to resolve issues or concerns that have been raised.
9. The RSPCA 'Five Freedoms/needs' include:
 - (1) Freedom from hunger and thirst - by providing ready access to fresh water and a balanced diet that maintains health and vigour.
 - (2) Freedom from pain, injury, and disease - by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
 - (3) Freedom from fear and distress - by ensuring conditions and treatment, which avoid mental suffering.

- (4) Freedom from discomfort - by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting and sleeping area; and
- (5) Freedom to express normal behaviour - by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and appropriate company of the animals' own kind.

10. Police Dog Welfare Visitors undertake impromptu visits on a monthly basis and:

- Attend programmed training days for police dogs and handlers held at various venues throughout Cheshire and North Wales.
- Inspect the kennels.
- Inspect police vehicles used to transport police dogs to ensure they are fit for purpose.

11. At the visits, the Dog Welfare Visitors record all observations, comments and any concerns relating to the welfare needs on a report form. The completed report is sent to the North Wales Scheme Administrator who reviews and records all comments made. Should any concerns be raised by the visitors regarding the welfare of the police dogs, the Scheme Administrator will raise this with the Dog Unit Sergeant and any action taken to resolve the concerns raised will be recorded. All information noted on the report form or gathered at the visits is confidential.

12. Following a successful recruitment process as of 31 March 2025, the Cheshire and North Wales Police Dog Welfare Scheme has eight Police Dog Welfare Visitors (located within Cheshire).

During the year we have learn about the passing of a much admired and respected volunteer Margaret Lockhart. Our thoughts are with her family and friends at this very sad time.

Visiting Data

13. Data from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 indicates that a total of 15 visits were completed in Cheshire and North Wales (comprising of training days and visits to the kennels), with 48 different dogs being observed during the year. On some visits, multiple dogs were observed, and some dogs were seen more than once throughout the year. On all visits, a total of 105 dogs were observed and checked by the volunteers.

14. In addition to kennels and training facilities, the operational vehicles were checked and reported to be in excellent condition.

Issues Raised

15. Throughout 2024/25, through their feedback Police Dog Welfare Visitors raised several problematic issues in relation to estates and facilities. The muddy conditions in the training field located next to the kennel facilities was mentioned on several occasions. The Estates team continue to investigate placing drainage in parts of the field to help drain water away from the site. This work has yet to be undertaken.

16. In addition to feedback suggesting what should be improved, Police Dog Welfare Visitors in their observations also noted positive feedback regarding the levels of care given to the dogs by their handlers and their excellent overall condition.

17. The Kennel staff were also praised for their knowledge and care of all the dogs in their care and for the high standards of cleanliness at the kennels. The Dog Welfare Volunteers also thank the kennel staff for their welcome at all times.

18. No complaints have been received regarding the welfare of any particular dog during the reporting period. Should one of the independent visitors receive information or a complaint in confidence regarding the welfare of a particular dog this information is forwarded immediately to the Scheme Administrator who arranges for the matter to be investigated.

Training & Development

- 19.** Police Dog Welfare Volunteers attend Police Dog Welfare Scheme meetings to discuss emerging issues from visits and any training needs.

The six new Police Dog Welfare Volunteers received training on their recruitment from the Dogs Trust and an input from two Police Dog Handlers. The training given was invaluable in helping the new recruits undertake their role successfully.

Contact

- 20.** For further information in relation to the Police Dog Welfare Visitors scheme, please contact:

Karolina Kardas (Scheme Administrator)
Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner, Runcorn Town Hall, Heath Road, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 5TD
E-mail: pcc@cheshire-pcc.gov.uk Tel: 01606 364000

Angharad Jones (Scheme Administrator)
Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner, Police Headquarters, Glan y Don, Colwyn Bay, Conwy, LL29 8AW
E-mail: opcc@northwales.police.uk Tel: 01492 805486