

Police Dog Welfare Visitors Scheme

2025-26 annual report



Dan Price
Cheshire
Police & Crime
Commissioner

Foreword from the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner

I am pleased to present this annual report for the Cheshire Police Dog Welfare Visitors Scheme, highlighting the valuable contribution our volunteers have made over the past year.

Independent scrutiny plays a vital role in maintaining public confidence and this scheme provides reassurance that Cheshire police dogs, are cared for to the highest standards. Through regular visits to kennels, training grounds and checks of vehicles used to transport police dogs our visitors help ensure that the welfare, care and treatment of these animals remain ethical, humane, transparent and fully aligned with the requirements of the Welfare Act 2006.



The volunteers involved bring invaluable insight, offering an independent perspective and a strong commitment to animal welfare. Their observations help identify areas of good practice, whilst also highlighting opportunities for improvement where necessary. Although the scheme is straightforward in its approach, its impact is significant, strengthening accountability, promoting continuous improvement and reinforcing public trust in the way Cheshire Police cares for and trains its police dogs.

This initiative directly reflects our commitment to openness and public involvement. By providing independent oversight, the scheme helps ensure that the welfare of our police dogs remains a priority and that the standards expected by our communities continues to be met.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all of our Dog Welfare Visitors for the time, dedication and professionalism they have shown throughout the year. Their efforts make a positive difference, helping ensure that our police dogs remain healthy, well cared for and ready to serve the communities of Cheshire.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Dan Price'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a white background.

Dan Price

Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner

Introduction

This annual report captures details of the work of the Cheshire Police Dog Welfare Visitors (PDWVs) Scheme between the 1st April 2025 and 31st March 2026, including observations arising from visits to kennels, training sessions and police dog transport vehicles.

Background

The Cheshire PDWVs Scheme continues to provide independent scrutiny of the care, training, transportation and welfare of police dogs within the Cheshire Police Dog Section.

The Scheme was established in Cheshire in 2002 and, following the amalgamation of the Cheshire and North Wales Police Dog Units in 2016, until July 2025 operated as a joint Cheshire & North Wales Police Dog Welfare Scheme. Since July 2025 Cheshire Police Dog Unit operates separately and independently.

PDWVs are members of the local community who volunteer their time to observe, comment upon and report on the welfare of police dogs. Visitors operate independently and have no direct involvement with the police force.

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, accommodation, transport arrangements and operational deployment remain ethical, humane, transparent and accountable.



Police Dog Mali

Operation of the Scheme

Police Dog Welfare Visitors undertake unannounced and pre-arranged visits throughout the year. During these visits they:

- Attend police dog training sessions
- Inspect kennel facilities and exercise areas
- Observe police dogs whilst on duty and during training
- Inspect police vehicles used to transport police dogs
- Review arrangements for feeding, watering, exercise, housing and veterinary care

Visitors assess police dog welfare against the principles contained within the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the recognised “Five Welfare Needs”:

- A suitable environment
- A suitable diet
- The ability to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- Appropriate housing, with or apart from, other animals
- Protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease

Following each visit, volunteers complete a report detailing observations, comments, examples of good practice and any recommendations for improvement. Any matters requiring attention are brought to the attention of the Dog Unit management team and updates are provided where appropriate.



Trainee Police Dog Peppa

Visiting data

Number of visits to the kennels and training observations: 12

Number of dogs observed: 46 different police dogs

Total number of monitored dogs: 96

Some dogs were observed on multiple occasions as part of routine welfare monitoring.

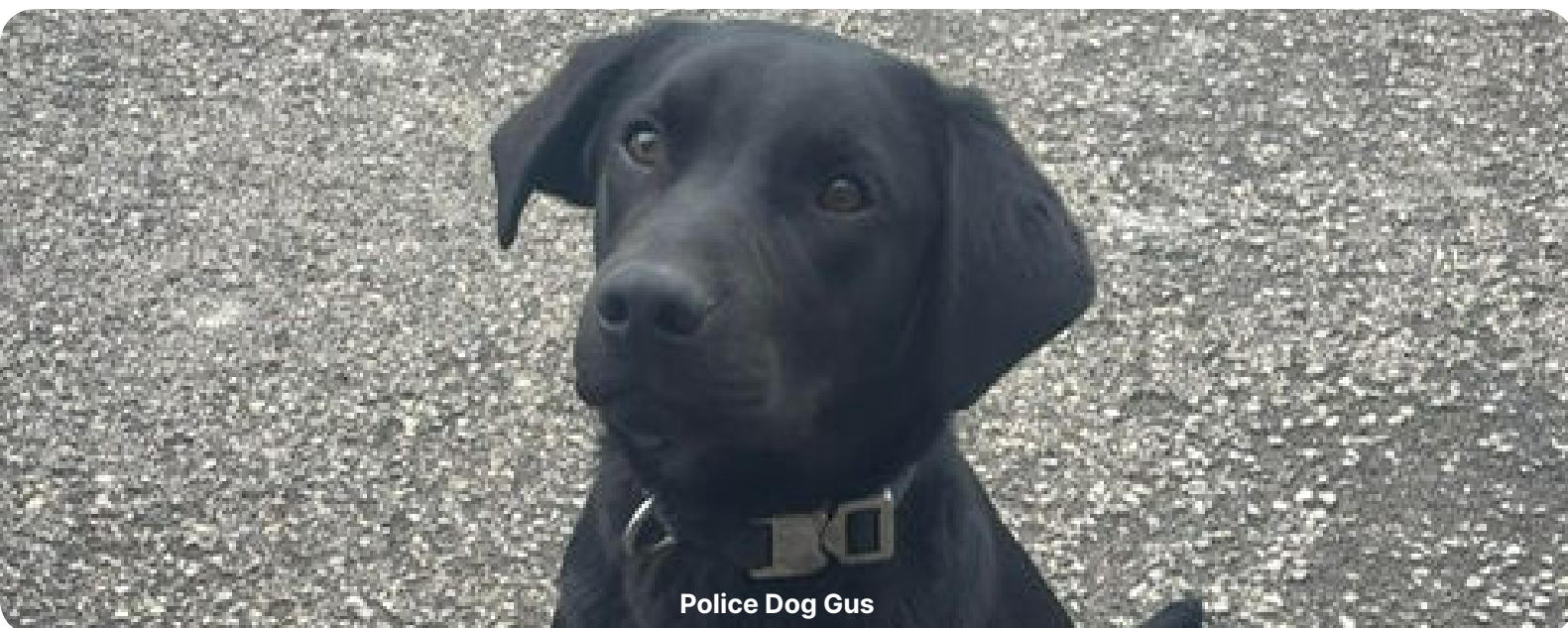
In addition to observing the dogs themselves, volunteers inspected kennel facilities, exercise area and operational vehicles used for transportation of police dogs.

General overview

No significant welfare concerns were identified during the reporting period.

No complaints were received regarding the welfare of any individual police dog.

Where minor issues were identified, including field drainage concerns and suggestions for facility enhancements, these were discussed constructively with the Dog Unit and recorded for ongoing consideration.



Police Dog Gus

Key findings from visits

Positive welfare observations

Throughout the year, PDWVs consistently reported that police dogs were:

- Clean and well cared for
- Maintained in good body condition
- Provided with access to fresh water
- Free from any obvious signs of injury, illness or disease, except where existing medical conditions were already being actively managed
- Housed in clean, safe and appropriate accommodation

Visitors regularly commented positively on the professionalism and commitment shown by handlers, trainers and kennel staff.

Several examples of good welfare practice were observed, including:

- Adapted feeding arrangements for individual dogs
- Environmental modifications to prevent water bowls from being overturned
- Provision of paddling pools and cooling measures during periods of extreme heat
- Careful monitoring of dogs recovering from injury or veterinary treatment
- Individual housing decisions based on temperament and welfare needs
- Appropriate management plans for dogs requiring specific handling arrangements



Kennel and facility improvements

PDWVs noted a number of welfare-related improvements during the year including:

- Installation of a weather station to support temperature monitoring
- Introduction of solar lighting for winter months
- Continued use of seasonal sunshade arrangements
- Ongoing monitoring and management of kennel temperatures during periods of hot weather
- Adaption of kennel use to support dogs receiving veterinary treatment

Kennel cleanliness remained consistently high throughout the reporting period. Visitors frequently observed kennels being cleaned, maintained and prepared for occupancy.

Issues and recommendations raised

The most frequently raised issue related to the condition and drainage of the exercise fields.

Visitors first highlighted concerns during April 2025 and continued to raise the issue throughout the year.



Concerns centred on:

- Standing water and muddy conditions during wetter months
- Potential handler safety risks when managing wet dogs
- Reduced usability of training and exercise areas

Whilst visitors welcomed the fact that drainage conditions were being monitored, they recommended that long-term drainage improvements remain a priority.

During periods of hot weather, visitors discussed the management of dogs in operational vehicles. In particular:

- The use of vehicle air conditioning
- Temperature monitoring arrangements
- Ventilation within vehicles
- The potential use of additional non-slip padding or rubber matting

Visitors were reassured by demonstrations of temperature monitoring systems and the ongoing management of vehicle welfare arrangements.

Training observations

Visitors attended a number of training sessions throughout the year involving both operational dogs and dogs undergoing training.

Training activities observed included:

- Tracking exercises
- Heelwork
- Article searches
- General obedience work
- Development training for younger dogs

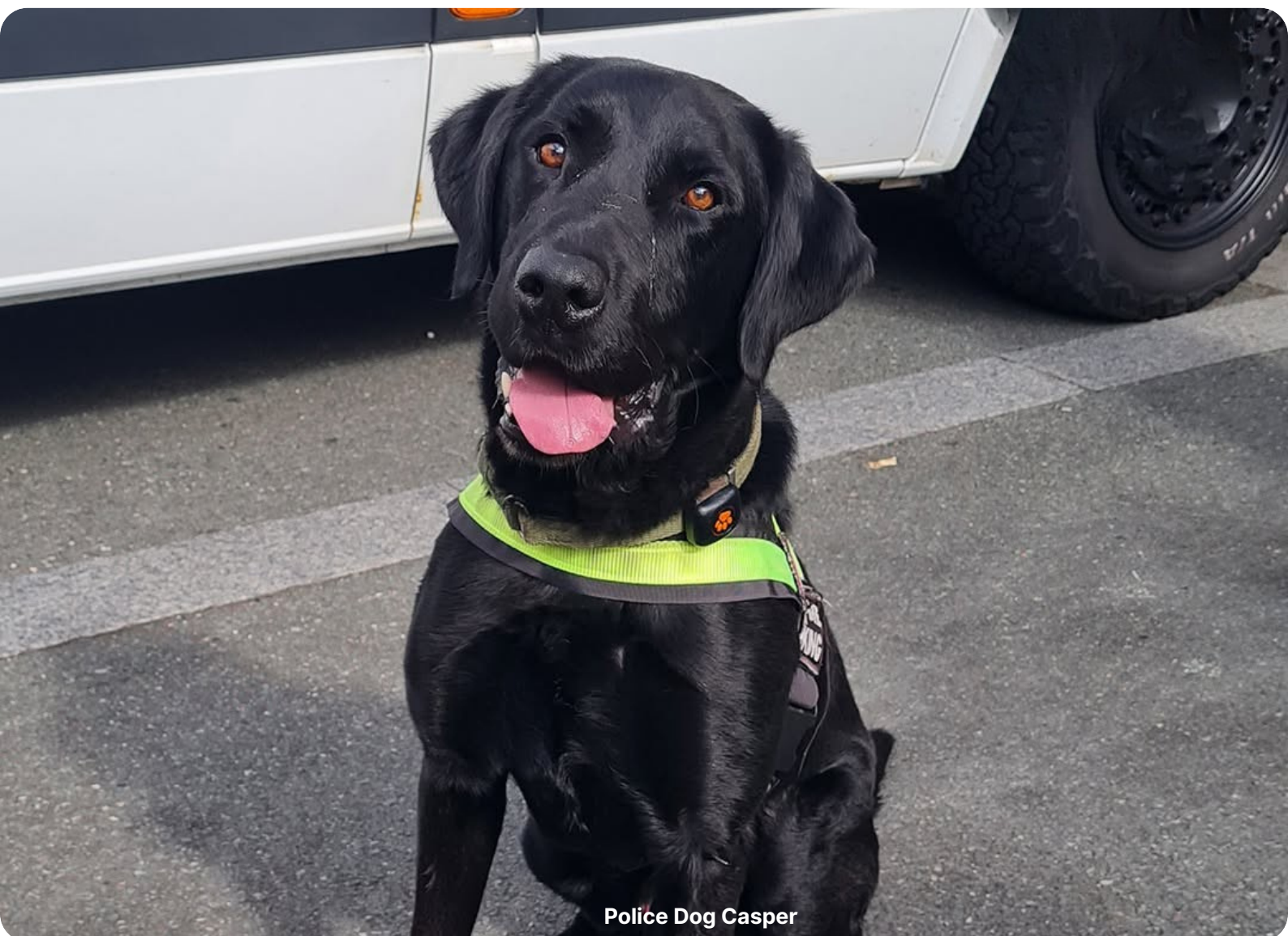
PDWVs consistently reported that dogs appeared engaged, confident and enthusiastic whilst undertaking training activities. Positive reinforcement, praise, play and encouragement were regularly observed being used by handlers and trainers.

Conclusion

The findings from visits throughout 2025-26 demonstrate that police dogs within the Cheshire Dogs Unit continue to receive a high standard of care from their handlers, trainers and kennel staff.

PDWVs were consistently satisfied that dogs had access to suitable accommodation, water, appropriate exercise, veterinary support and welfare-focused management.

The continued commitment of staff to maintaining high welfare standards, alongside their willingness to engage positively with visitors and their feedback is reassuring to observe from the perspective of independent scrutiny.



Police Dog Casper

Get involved

For more information or to express an interest in becoming a Police Dog Welfare visitor please contact Karolina Kardas, PDWV Scheme Coordinator.

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