



**NORTHUMBRIA  
POLICE & CRIME  
COMMISSIONER**

# **INDEPENDENT DOG WELFARE VISITORS SCHEME**

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

### **2023 - 2024**

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# FROM THE COMMISSIONER

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I am pleased to be presenting this report, however, as you will appreciate the period of time covers the previous Police and Crime Commissioner, Kim McGuinness, but I am proud to comment on the excellent work that has taken place over the last year, and I will continue to support our excellent Dog Welfare Visitors.

Over the last year, Independent Dog Welfare Visitors continued to provide independent external scrutiny of the care and treatment of our police dogs in Northumbria. They ensured that procedures and the care provided is ethical, humane and transparent in accordance with the Animal Welfare Act 2006. The welfare scheme continued to operate providing assurance to residents of the Northumbria force area that police dogs are being well cared for. The report highlights the work that visitors have taken including visits to both kennel complexes, police stations and the training venues of our dogs.

As a result, 24 visits were undertaken between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 and 143 dogs checked, which is excellent and an increase on the 132 dogs visited in 2022/23. I am pleased to note that the Dog Welfare Visitors did not raise any serious concerns for those dogs that they visited. Minor points relating to chewed matting in vans were quickly rectified by officers.

Remote temperature controls introduced during 2022 have continued to work well in addition to improvements made to the Durham HQ Kennel complex including roofing, heating system for the winter months and kennel flooring. Visitors have also highlighted increasing enrichment activities would be beneficial for dogs when at the kennels, with work ongoing to increase the enrichment available.

All of the above changes introduced show the positive impact that the visitors have had and I would like to thank both my visitors and the Northumbria Police dog section for their work over the year.

**Best Wishes,  
Susan Dungworth  
Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria**

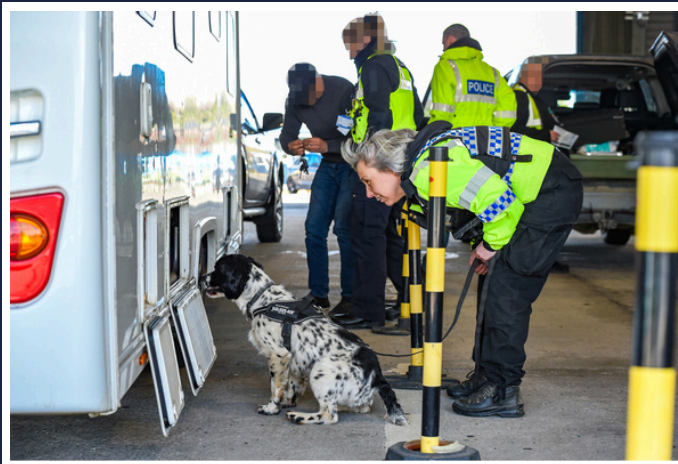


# OVERVIEW

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## BY SGT JONATHAN GOLIGHTLY

The Independent Dog Welfare Visitors continue to provide essential scrutiny into the wellbeing and care of our Police Dogs across Northumbria. With a team of approximately 60 dogs working 24/7 across the force area, we are grateful to the coordination team from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner in their attempts to maximise the number of visits from their pool of dedicated volunteers. As a Dog Sergeant I see every day the passion and dedication our Dog Handlers and training team demonstrate towards their dogs and I'm proud of the work our teams perform in supporting operational policing. The Dog Welfare Visitors Scheme gives us the opportunity to share this training, care, and professionalism with the visiting volunteers.



The scheme also gives us the opportunity to listen and learn, the volunteers have varying backgrounds and experiences in the world of dog care and training. It has been a pleasure to work with them over the last 12 months, particularly on suggestions to improve the enrichment of our dogs whilst in the kennel environment.

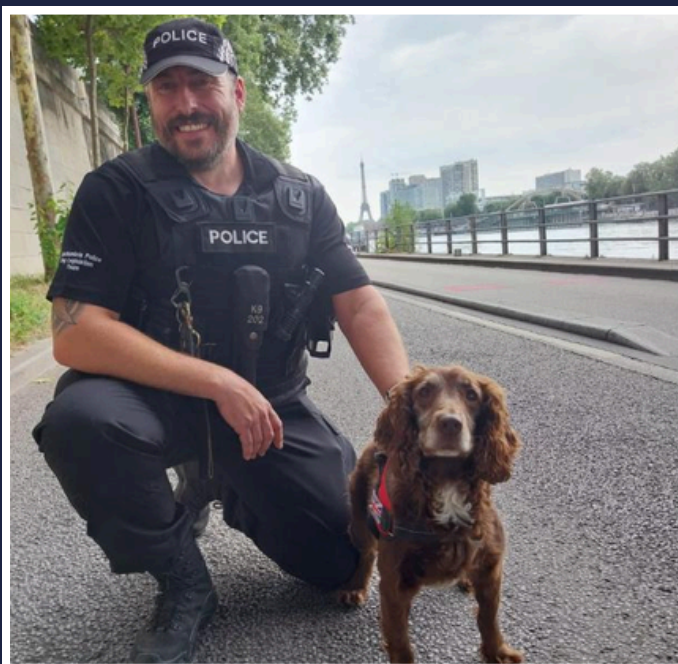
# OVERVIEW

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## BY SGT JONATHAN GOLIGHTLY

It is without doubt that equipment, protocols, and ongoing investment we have benefited from over the last 12 months wouldn't have been possible without the support of the welfare visitors. One particular success of the program has been the investment in dog body armour for all of our front-line General Purpose Dogs. The armour is now worn at all dog deployments where there is a likelihood of conflict. The armour affords our dogs a similar level of protection to the armour worn by our handlers and has been very well received by both our staff and the public.

The scheme can present logistical issues at times, it is a requirement that every dog is seen at least once a year however, the unpredictable nature of policing can sometimes make this difficult. It is thanks to the flexibility and dedication of the volunteers that has helped us overcome these challenges. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them all for their understanding and continued support and look forward to building on our relationship in 2024/2025.

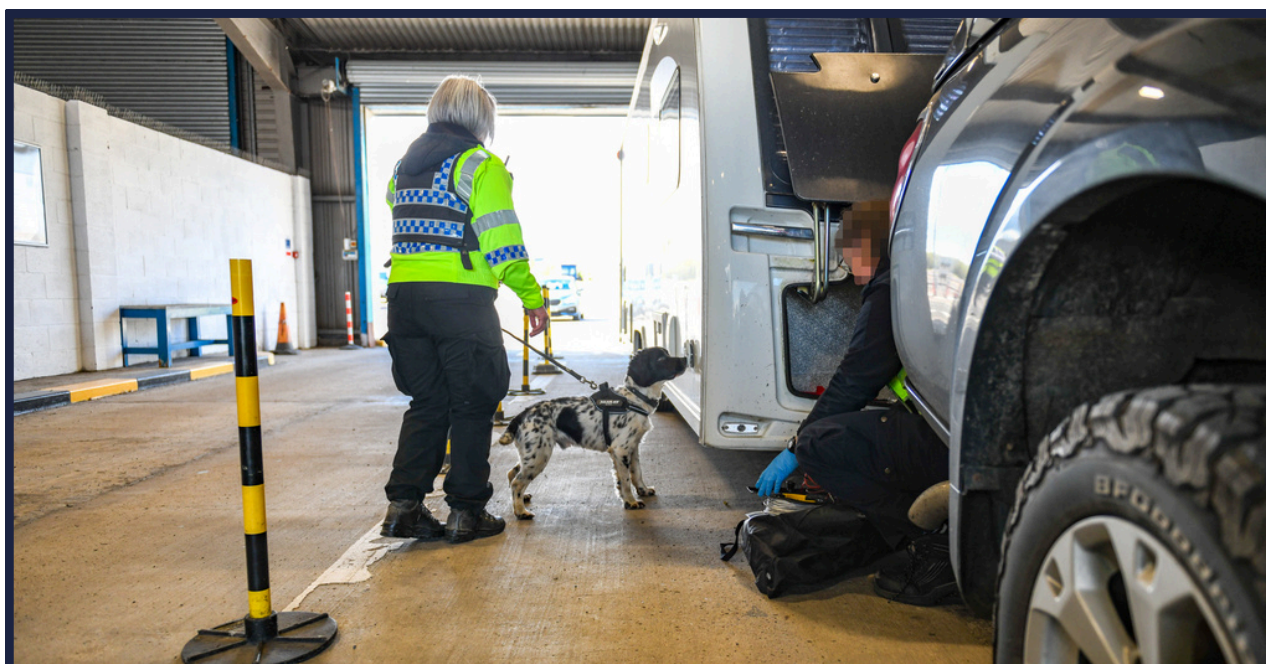


# OUR DOG WELFARE SCHEME & VISITING ARRANGEMENTS

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The Northumbria Dog Welfare Visiting Scheme was established in September 2021 with the aim of the scheme to inspect each police dog at least every 12 months. There are currently 65 dogs however this number regularly changes due to dogs retiring and new dogs coming on board. We have 6 Dog Welfare Visitors who follow a set rota for the full year incorporating visits to Etal Lane Police Station (excluding September), quarterly visits to the kennel complex currently in our neighbouring force Durham and quarterly visits to see our dogs in training.

Independent Dog Welfare Visitors are members of the public who observe, comment and report on the condition of the police dogs and their means of transportation whilst on duty. To maintain the scheme's independence and avoid any conflict of interest, visitors have no direct involvement with Northumbria Police. They are not allowed to be a serving or retired police officer, a member of police staff, Police Community Support Officer, Special Constable or Magistrate. Visitors carry out inspections on all police dogs within the Dog Unit. The Unit includes 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 and include dogs that specialise in detecting drugs, cash, guns, weapons, and explosives.



## REPORTING AND RECORDING VISITS

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Visitors record all observations, comments and any concerns relating to welfare needs on a report form that we have recently worked with the Dogs Trust to make electronic. This allows visitors to access a set of questions which changes depending on their type of visit to be quickly and easily completed online and submitted electronically. If a welfare issue is reported, the Scheme Administrator will raise this directly with the Dog Unit Sergeant who is the lead contact for the scheme. Any action taken to resolve issues is recorded by the Scheme Administrator and discussed at quarterly Dog Welfare Visitor meetings. All information noted on the report form or gathered at the visits is confidential for use by the OPCC and Dog Unit.

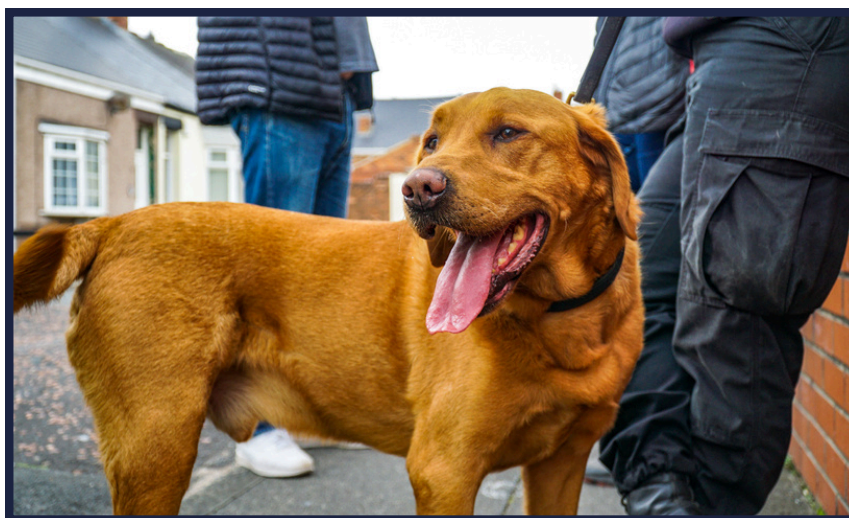
In addition, each year the Dog Unit must submit the following forms for all dogs or officers home kennels:

- Annual Vet Form
- Annual Handler Home Kennel form

## QUARTERLY PANEL MEETINGS

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Quarterly Panel Meetings are held with Visitors and representatives from the Dog Unit and the Dogs Trust. This is an opportunity to make Visitors aware of any legislative changes and updates from the Dog Unit, as well as for the unit to receive feedback directly from Visitors.



## **VISITS FROM THE PAST YEAR AND FINDINGS**

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Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, visitors completed 24 visits, resulting in 143 dog checks. The visits took place at Etal Lane Police Station, Durham Constabulary Kennels and a training location in the North East. Visitors monitor the condition of the police dogs and their means of transportation while on duty. Over the last twelve months no serious concerns were noted.

Visitors were very useful in assisting in increased reporting during periods of hot weather over the summer months. Their visits and comments assisted in the introduction of:

- Provision of canine boots for our dogs to protect their paws during their work.
- Enrichment – introduction of frozen Kongs for dogs housed at Durham Kennel complex with further work ongoing to further increase enrichment activities.
- Works undertaken at Durham Police Kennels facility including roofing, Air conditioning/heating, new kennels and flooring.
- Replacement matting in dog vans.
- Input into the design of potential new Northumbria Police kennels.

## **DOG SECTION UPDATE 2023/24**

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The last 12 months we have seen the Dog Section retire 20 dogs for a variety of reasons, these include age, on medical grounds or not meeting the required standard. Fourteen of the dogs were found good homes or were retired to live with their former handlers, six remain within the section awaiting suitable rehoming being identified.

In response to legislative changes to the Dangerous Dogs Act and the inclusion of “XL Bully” animals the dog section established a Dog Legislation team to coordinate Northumbria police’s response to the extra ordinary demand this has generated. The Dog legislation team, currently consisting of three members of staff two seconded from dog section and a newly recruited dedicated full time dog legislation officer, prosecute cases to court in relation to Dangerous dog breed incidents and provide support to officers investigating dog related incidents.

In response to feedback / suggestions from the lay visitor team, work has begun to identify if opportunities exist for improvements to be made to the protective footwear issued to dogs.

The dog section vehicle fleet has been partially refreshed with the section now utilising a mixed fleet of traditional transit dog vans and new Ford Focus cars which are equipped with larger cages than the previous generation cars. Three dog handlers are currently undergoing training / assessment as home office approved dog instructors which will increase the training cadre without impacting upon day-to-day staffing levels.

Work continues towards Northumbria police once again having its own kennelling facility to house the organisations dogs, the lay visitors input and insight as we progress towards that goal will be invaluable. In the interim the lay visitors feed back / input on how to improve / enrich the current kennelling provision provided by Durham Constabulary has been of benefit.





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