



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Animal Welfare Team
Area 5D, 17 Smith Square
London, SW1P 3JR



Mr T H Kirkman, MA
Senior Coroner for Rutland & N Leics
Loughborough Coroner's Office
Charnwood Borough Council Offices
Southfield Road
Loughborough
Leics LE11 2TR



Date: 11 November 2014

Dear Mr Kirkman,

Thank you for your letter of 3 October about the inquest into the death of Lexi Branson.

We take the issue of dangerous dogs very seriously and were saddened to hear of the death of Lexi. The Government has been taking steps to improve responsible ownership of dogs, including increasing the maximum penalties for allowing a dog to be dangerously out of control and extending the scope of the offence of allowing a dog to be dangerously out of control to *all* places. We have also introduced early intervention measures through the new anti-social behaviour toolkit that will enable local authority officers or the police to issue warning notices to owners, where such behaviour involves a dog.

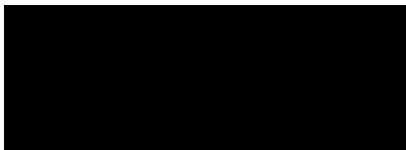
We realise that these new measures do not fall within the scope of your suggestions to which we have given serious consideration. We understand that re-homing centres need to be aware of any behaviour problems in their dogs. Thousands of dogs are rehomed every year and the vast majority cause no problems for their new owners. Most rehoming centres are responsible and will identify any dogs where the behaviour is a cause for concern or where the owner's personal circumstances may not suit the dog in question. The problem with trying to apply standards in relation to testing a dog's behaviour is that it is by no means an exact science. A dog might pass a behaviour test but it would not necessarily be a guarantee that the dog's behaviour will not be a cause for concern once it is in new surroundings and with a new owner. As I mentioned, most dog re-homing centres take appropriate steps, along the lines you have proposed, to try and prevent such incidents occurring.

The Government is determined to reduce dog attacks and appreciates the comments and suggestions you have made. What would be useful at this stage is for the department to explore with larger recognised dog rehoming organisations such as Dogs Trust, RSPCA, Blue Cross and Battersea Dogs & Cats Home to see whether they would be willing to share their rehoming checks with other smaller rehoming centres.



We will therefore write to the main dog rehoming centres (*explaining the recommendations you have made*) and explore ways in which best practice in dog rehoming checks can be disseminated to others involved in this activity.

Yours sincerely

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Head of Animal Welfare