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28 January 2015

From Lord de Mauley
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Natural Environment and Science

Thank you for your letter of 8 December with which you enclosed a report of the death of Jade Anderson together with your recommendations for action.

Let me first say I was deeply saddened to hear of the death of Jade Anderson and the circumstances in which it happened. I have met Jade's mother and step-father and on behalf of the whole of the Government we pass on our condolences to Jade's family and friends for their tragic loss.

The Government is serious about tackling irresponsible ownership of dogs which is why we have recently changed the existing law in two important respects.

In May last year we extended the scope of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 so that it is now an offence to allow any dog to be dangerously out of control in any place, including inside the dog owner's property. At the same time, we increased the maximum penalty for allowing a dog to be dangerously out of control and it killing someone from 2 years' imprisonment to 14 years; and if the dog injures someone the increase was from 2 years' imprisonment to 5 years. In addition, there is also a separate offence of allowing a dog to attack an assistance dog which attracts a maximum sentence of 3 years' imprisonment.

It is important to understand that the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 is not just about banning certain types of dog. It also makes it an offence to allow any dog of any breed or type to become dangerously out of control. It therefore covers both deed and breed.

We have also responded to calls for the law to be more proactive. To this end, we made sure that the new measures to deal with anti-social behaviour, in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime & Policing Act 2014, could be used to tackle such behaviour when it involves irresponsible ownership of a dog. These new laws mean that police and local authorities now have powers to intervene in cases of low level dog nuisance, before a serious incident occurs – for example, a dog running loose in a park or near a road, a dog that threatens visitors or even a situation where there are too many dogs on a property and it is having a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality. This means that action can be



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taken before a dog becomes dangerous. The new powers came into effect on 20 October 2014.

To help the police and local authorities use the new measures appropriately, Government produced a comprehensive Practitioner's Manual. You can find the Manual on this link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dealing-with-irresponsible-dog-ownership-practitioners-manual> The Manual was drawn up with the cooperation of the practitioners themselves and animal welfare charities and has been widely welcomed. There are a number of scenarios envisaged in the document which help the practitioners deal with a range of specific incidents they might face, including complaints relating to dogs on a property.

In addition to the manual there is also a comprehensive training programme for police officers on the new laws on dogs. The police, in particular, are responsible for enforcing the law on dangerous dogs. Despite the law on dangerous dogs being in more than one statute, which is not unusual, the police have specifically trained officers to deal with such complaints – Dog Legislation Officers (DLOs). Nearly all forces have DLOs and where these are not available, they can be obtained from neighbouring forces. Local authorities also have access to dedicated Dog Wardens to deal with stray and displaced dogs. These too are specifically trained to handle dogs and are familiar with the law in this area. I therefore consider that training is already available to enforcers and that consolidation of the legislation on dangerous dogs is not a priority.

You also requested the re-introduction of the dog licence. Compliance rates in countries where such a scheme operates currently are not very high – typically around 40% or 50%. Indeed, this was one of the reasons the dog licence was abolished in this country in 1988. A low rate of compliance makes it difficult for a dog licensing scheme to be effective. However, whilst I do not support dog licensing, I do support compulsory microchipping of dogs. Microchipping has clear advantages for both dog and owner in that they can be reunited much quicker if the dog strays or is lost. It provides a permanent link between owner and dog. There will be a link between the available microchip databases to ensure that the owner of a dog can be ascertained quickly. Since we announced compulsory microchipping will be introduced in April 2016 numbers of dogs that are microchipped have risen from around 58% to 70% which shows that owners can see the benefits. Microchipping of dogs will not necessarily prevent dog attacks but it does encourage a level of responsibility in the owner and will achieve some of the desired benefits of a licensing scheme.

I also note what you say about education and training of children around dogs. As you point out, there is already good work being carried out by the RSPCA in this area. Similarly, the Dogs Trust, Battersea Dogs & Cats Home and the Kennel Club all provide helpful advice about children and dogs, and we have been able to give them financial support to help them with this work. As the recognised experts in this area, I think the charities are better placed to give this advice to dog owners and keepers, and they are more likely to be heeded than a Government leaflet. We and the charities are also working with the leading websites carrying advertisements for dogs to improve information for owners.

Overall, I consider that the actions we have taken recently, and those we are proposing to take, will have a positive impact on instances of irresponsible dog ownership. Thank you once again for your letter and report.



