



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

**WRITTEN STATEMENT
BY
THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**

TITLE **Raising dog welfare standards**

DATE **16 December 2013**

BY **Alun Davies AM, Minister for Natural Resources and Food**

The purpose of this Written Statement is to provide an update for Members on the Welsh Government's policy to drive forward welfare for dogs and their responsible ownership in Wales.

This work has a number of elements including introduction of regulations in Wales for the licensing of dog breeding premises and the micro-chipping of dogs – separate statements will be released outlining progress on these matters.

In May this year I confirmed that I would work with UK Government Ministers to bring forward provisions in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill (the UK Bill) to implement some of our policies relating to welfare of dogs and their responsible ownership. In so doing I committed to suspending work on the Control of Dogs (Wales) Bill, while I discussed the detail of the provisions in the UK Bill with the UK Government. I have since met with both Jeremy Brown, Minister of State for Crime Prevention and Lord De Mauley, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Natural Environment and Science, on a number of occasions to discuss Wales' position in relation to the legislation. Additionally my officials continue to work closely with their colleagues in the Home Office and Defra.

Whilst it was a difficult decision to suspend the Control of Dogs (Wales) Bill the evidence was compelling that the UK Bill could be shaped to include many, if not nearly all, elements of improvement we were hoping to achieve via that legislation. I still retain the right to bring forward the Control of Dogs (Wales) Bill and/or to introduce secondary legislation should the UK Bill not deliver what we require to take forward the dog welfare policies we support for Wales. However, at present, we are content with progress on the UK Bill, following close co-operation between us and the UK Government on the dog-related aspects of the UK Bill.

Policy work undertaken in Wales helped inform the changes to the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (DDA) (contained within the Bill) to make an attack on assistance dogs an offence, sadly a recent case in Wales highlights the need for such a law to exist.

Defra also consulted in England and Wales on the sentencing regime associated with the DDA and the Bill has now been amended to reflect a much more severe fine and sentencing regime.

I acknowledge the concerns regarding the lack of reference to a “dog control notice” in the UK Bill but the concept of a Community Protection Notice can and will apply to out of control and dangerously out of control dogs. It can also apply to owners of dogs who are not acting responsibly but the key to success will be how the tools are utilised by enforcement practitioners. To assist in this process it has been agreed that separate guidance for use by practitioners and enforcers be developed and the first draft of that guidance is on the following website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-irresponsible-dog-ownership-draft-practitioners-manual>

Whilst Defra is the lead on the guidance Welsh Government officials continue to take a proactive approach in shaping it and are working closely with local authorities, police and key stakeholders where relevant.

The progress being made on the UK Bill is at a steady pace and dictated by Parliamentary timeframes but the Welsh Government continues to emphasise that the owners’ role and responsibility is key to the welfare of the animal being maintained and improved. Early intervention and behaviour change is an essential element.

Owning a dog is a personal choice – meeting the welfare needs of that animal is already a statutory requirement. The work that both the Welsh Government and the UK Government are undertaking will support the future enforcement of that requirement.

This statement is being issued during recess in order to keep members informed. Should members wish me to make a further statement or to answer questions on this when the Assembly returns I would be happy to do so.