

Policy position on dogs in public amenity spaces

1. Dogs play an important role in our society. They are the most popular pet in UK households, providing companionship, helping their owners to stay fit and healthy, and in the case of Assistance Dogs, providing support to people with disabilities. Some dogs also help to protect us from threats to our safety, for example by detecting explosives, harmful substances, and weapons.
2. Owners must act responsibly to care for their dog. In fact, they have a legal duty to ensure that their animal's welfare needs are being met (Animal Welfare Act 2006), which includes protecting them from pain, suffering, injury and disease and allowing them to exhibit normal behaviour. As part of this it is important that dogs have the opportunity to exercise to help them stay healthy, and to interact with other dogs and with people to help them socialise and practice their normal behaviours.
3. Responsible dog ownership also means ensuring that dogs remain under control and do not cause a nuisance. Dogs need training and socialisation to promote good behaviour and they must also be microchipped to aid in reunification if they become lost. Dog owners must clean up after their dog, especially as dog faeces can carry infectious disease that can harm other animals and people, and local authorities should provide suitable bins for the disposal of dog faeces. Dog owners are also responsible for worming their dog regularly.
4. Where individuals are walking a number of dogs, they should ensure that they are able to effectively manage all of the dogs under their control and clean up after them. The strength of the dogs and their individual and collective behaviour will be a factor in this.
5. Allowing dogs to access public spaces not only encourages dogs to exercise and socialise, but can also be beneficial for the health of their owners: obesity in dogs is of increasing concern, and vets believe that providing more exercise would have a significant impact on canine health and welfare (Voice of the Veterinary Profession 2014, BVA), while dog owners report that owning a pet motivates

them to exercise more, and makes them feel mentally healthier (PSDA Paw Report, 2016) .

6. In some instances, it may be appropriate to restrict individual dogs from certain areas on public safety grounds, or to limit general access in certain areas, such as playgrounds or sports fields. However, any measures that are put in place to limit access should be justified, reasonable, proportionate, and appropriate for the situation, with exceptions made for Assistance Dogs. Alternative dog walking areas should be made available in the locality where any restrictions are in place.
7. Some public areas in England and Wales are covered by Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) - previously called Dog Control Orders (DCOs), which may require dogs to be kept on leads. However, overuse of restrictions could result in dogs being segregated from areas of public activity. Keeping a dog on a lead at all times in public (Road Traffic Act, 1988), or isolating dogs to particular areas, is likely to reduce their ability to show a normal range of behaviours and therefore negatively impact on their welfare. Ultimately this could prove counter-productive, as dogs are more likely to show aggression when exposed to unexpected or unknown events.
8. Responsible owners and their dogs can have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of our communities. It is important that measures that are intended to protect communities from anti-social behaviour do not end up isolating responsible owners and depriving communities and their dogs from the benefit of social interaction.

References

- Legislation.gov.uk. (2015). Animal Welfare Act 2006, Scotland, Welfare of Animals Act, Northern Ireland. [online] Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/contents> [Accessed 17 Aug. 2017].
- British Veterinary Association. (2014). Voice of the profession survey. [online] Available at: <https://www.bva.co.uk/voice/> [Accessed 17 Aug. 2017].

88% felt that providing more exercise would have a significant impact on canine health and welfare.

- PDSA. (2016). Animal Wellbeing Report 2016. [online] Available at:
<https://www.pdsa.org.uk/get-involved/our-current-campaigns/pdsa-animal-wellbeing-report> [Accessed 17 Aug 2017].
84% of dog owners feel that owning a pet makes them physically healthier.
- Legislation.gov.uk. (2015). Road Traffic Act, 1988. [online] Available at:
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/52/contents> [Accessed 17 Aug. 2017].
A person who causes or permits a dog to be on a designated road without the dog being held on a lead is guilty of an offence.