Independent Dog Welfare Lay Visitors Scheme

The Dog Unit Lay Visiting Scheme was established by the Essex Police Authority in October 1999 following the death of a police dog during a training exercise. The lessons learned highlighted the need for a transparent and accountable scheme to provide public confidence in the way police animals are trained and cared for. Independent Dog Welfare Lay Visitors, carry out an essential and invaluable task in maintaining public confidence and ensuring that Essex Constabulary’s police dogs are treated and cared for in the best possible way.

- Dog Welfare Visitors are independent members of the local community, who are employed on a voluntary basis by the Police and Crime Commissioner for Essex to check on the welfare of the Forces’ police dogs.

- The Scheme enables the public to ensure that the care and treatment of Police dogs from Essex is humane, ethical, and transparent and complies with the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

- Independent Dog Welfare Visitors are employed to carry out inspections of dogs from within the Essex Police Dog Unit at Sandon in Chelmsford or at a mutually agreed location within Essex.

- Each police dog is to be inspected by an Independent Dog Welfare Visitor at least every six months and visitors are required to complete a report form of their findings and return it to the Scheme Administrator for recording.

- Visitors will be invited to all dog training events. If an Independent Dog Welfare Visitor wishes to visit a training event, it may involve walking over rough and uneven ground/farmland. Visitors should be capable of carrying out this activity.

- Visitors are required to attend quarterly panel meetings with the Scheme Administrator, Dog Unit Inspector and Dogs Trust to discuss any issues relating to visits and the dog unit.

- Newly appointed visitors will be invited to attend an information/training session with the Dogs Trust. The training will take place over one day and will include dog training methods, animal welfare, transportation and health and safety. Additionally, periodic and refresher training days will be provided, as and when required.
• Visitors should be independent persons of good character who can make unbiased observations and provide documented feedback to the PCC Office.

• Visitors must not have any direct involvement with Essex Police i.e be a serving or retired police officer, member of police staff, Police Community Support Officer, Special Constable or magistrate. This is in order to maintain the scheme’s independence and avoid any conflict of interest.

• All appointments are subject to a successful security check and references.

• Newly appointed Lay Visitors will complete a 6 month probationary period.

• The term of an Animal Welfare Lay Visitor is three years with the option for a renewal for a further three year term.

• Although the role is entirely voluntary, The Police and Crime Commissioner for Essex has the right to terminate the appointment of any lay visitor whose conduct is unsatisfactory.

• The role of an Independent Dog Welfare Visitor is unpaid; however travelling expenses will be paid at the Force rate. Other fees and expenses may be paid at the discretion of the PCC.

• The PCC will provide appropriate insurance cover for their Independent Dog Welfare Visitors.