

Responsible dog ownership

An initiative to encourage education around responsible dog ownership to reduce the number of serious dog attacks within a small community estate.

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Key details

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| Stage of practice | Evaluated locally |
| Purpose | Prevention |
| Topic | Violence (other) Anti-social behaviour Community engagement |
| Organisation | Gwent Police |
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| Region | Wales |
| Partners | Police Community safety partnership Education Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation |
| Stage of implementation | The practice is implemented. |

Key details

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| Start date | January 2023 |
| Scale of initiative | Local |
| Target group | Adults Children and young people Communities Families General public Offenders Victims |

Aim

The initiative aims to encourage the responsible ownership of dogs in the community and reduce the number of dog-related incidents and attacks.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of responsible dog ownership are:

- a reduction in the number of serious dog attacks in the community
- an increase in reporting of any dangerous dog incidents

Description

A combination of the need for education and raising awareness prompted a multi-agency approach to encouraging responsible dog ownership in the community.

The local councillor for Penyrheol arranged community meetings and open days, which were attended by Gwent Police, the Community Safety Partnership, and the Dogs Trust. These workshops were held at the Penyrheol community centre. The purpose was to disseminate

information on responsible dog ownership, emphasising the importance of licencing, microchipping, the use of leads and adhering to current laws and legislation.

At these events, local partnerships were also able to collaborate and provide information on charities and caring for different breeds of dogs. This enhanced the level of active guardians across the area who could support victims enhancing their knowledge and understanding of what would constitute an offence. This approach also allowed members of the community to speak with police and partners regarding their concerns, report anti-social behaviour and provide vital intelligence to the police, Trading Standards and the RSPCA.

Additionally, Gwent Police completed a series of warrants in Penyrheol, targeting suspected banned breeds and those behaving in a dangerously out of control manner, in line with Section 1 and 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. Several dogs were seized, and Gwent Police were able to track the bloodline to ensure that dogs from banned breeds were located and seized. The tracking process involves interviewing suspects alongside collating evidence around when puppies were born and who they were sold to. The owners of these banned breeds were charged and attended court. This proactive work emphasised to the community that the force actively targets those who put the community at risk.

Following these warrants, Gwent Police worked in collaboration with Trading Standards to tackle unlicensed dog breeding. This resulted in the removal of dogs due to poor living conditions and neglect. This helped raise awareness within the community that partners were proactively targeting owners who mistreated and neglected animals.

The initial response to the problem was positive. The community were aware of the proactive work of all partners, however, as an organisation the force wanted to find a long-term, sustainable solution to irresponsible dog behaviour. Through a benchmarking request, information was received from the Metropolitan Police Service around the Local Environmental Awareness on Dogs (LEAD) initiative.

On researching LEAD, it was established that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) had deemed it 'best practice' in their guidelines on dealing with anti-social behaviour and low-level incidents. For officers and partners, LEAD offered a proactive and long-term approach and solution to address irresponsible behaviour. Following this, the force requested that the project owner for LEAD in the Metropolitan Police meet with Gwent Police to provide a full

debrief on how the project worked and its success rate.

Once all the information was received, Gwent Police were satisfied that this project would support the force and partners to address, and potentially stop, irresponsible dog ownership. Gwent Police used a multi-agency approach, placing the LEAD initiative with the Community Safety Partnership. This would allow the force to use and share information in accordance with the Welsh Accord on Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI). A focus group was arranged between Gwent Police and the Community Safety Partners where the information was presented. This was followed up with several focus groups focusing on how LEAD could be used and developed in the Caerphilly area.

LEAD was launched in Caerphilly in September 2023. The project focused on early intervention to prevent anti-social behaviour with dogs, which significantly impacts a community. This intervention helped prevent and tackle dog behaviour that may escalate to bites, attacks and even fatalities. This project runs in conjunction with the Dangerous Dogs Act and uses civil law to fill gaps in current legislation.

LEAD has also opened a new QR code reporting tool enabling members of the community and other professionals to report any concerns. Information sharing has been key to supporting and addressing concerns from the public. This part of the project is ongoing and will continue to develop in line with the needs of the community.

LEAD has been placed into the anti-social behaviour civil process. This allows the use of informal, non-statutory methods to deal with dog-related complaints before resorting to anti-social behaviour powers. These measures include warning letters, meetings, and acceptable behaviour contracts. It is important to recognise that incidents concerning dogs occur for a wide range of reasons and dog behaviour can be complex. Therefore, having a staged approach allowed police and partners to discuss the situation with the owner at an early stage and understand the full background to the incident before starting civil proceedings.

Gwent Police have also collaborated with the Blue Cross charity to offer educational courses to owners who have come to notice when their dog has committed anti-social behaviour. The aim of the course is to improve the behaviour, wellbeing, and quality of life of the dog. This is achieved by developing owners' knowledge, attitude, and behaviour through education. The educational team focuses on dog safety, pet care and positive relationship with pets. This is completed online via a Zoom training session. This allows Gwent Police and partner to offer an educational approach

before looking at civil injunctions. Gwent Police was the first Welsh force to launch this course.

To continue the work around education, Gwent Police and the Community Safety Partnership have also supported the creation of a book with Parents Engaging To Raise Aspirations (PETRA). This is a small social enterprise that writes children's storybooks with the local community.

As part of the LEAD initiative, we have worked with local children in Penyrheol primary school to write 'The Dog Squad'. This fictional book educates children on dog behaviour and through story telling helps to educate and promote responsible dog ownership. This book will be shared with all local schools, community centres and libraries. The cost was covered by the Community Safety Partnership.

Overall impact

- There has been a decrease in serious dog attacks on the Penyrheol Estate.
- By raising awareness of irresponsible dog ownership and dangerous dogs to the public and partners, the force has seen an increase in the reporting of dangerous dogs and anti-social behaviour.
- Feedback was requested from families affected by dog attacks. These families were involved in the launch of the LEAD initiative and have openly shown support for the project.
- Your Voice survey has been completed with the community in Penyrheol directly after the fatalities and following the work and education completed.

On analysing the data leading up to and following the launch of the LEAD initiative, Gwent Police recorded the following increase:

- July 2023 – 10 calls to Caerphilly South regarding dog offences
- August 2023 – 8 calls to Caerphilly South regarding dog offences
- September 2023 – 17 calls to Caerphilly South regarding dog offences
- October 2023 – 21 calls to Caerphilly South regarding dog offences

Data captured from 2023 onwards has increased due to introduction of the laws around the XL Bully becoming a banned breed. This new development rapidly increased the support for the LEAD initiative and the reporting of dangerous dogs and incidents.

Due to the success of the project, on 1 July 2024 Gwent Police launched the initiative across the whole of the force.

Learning

Throughout the initiative, there have been opportunities for learning. In the initial scanning stage, Gwent Police wanted to lead the initiative. However, due to the complexity of the problem, the force realised that success would lie in a multi-agency approach. These areas of learning have naturally occurred throughout the project, but through the leadership and professionalism of all partners, the force have utilised problem-solving to ensure that actions are aligned with goals.

Through the preventative and educational approach, the force launched in Caerphilly with key stakeholders and the community developing a long-term sustainable solution to the problem of irresponsible dog ownership. This has been embraced by areas across Wales to allow a consistent approach, resulting in fewer serious dog related incidents.

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