

Local environmental awareness on dogs (LEAD)

An initiative to encourage responsible dog ownership through engagement with dog owners.

First published

3 June 2025

Key details

Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Anti-social behaviour Community engagement
Organisation	Metropolitan Police Service
Partners	Local authority
Target group	Adults Communities Families

Smarter practice

Overview

Local environmental awareness on dogs (LEAD) is a police-led partnership initiative in the London Borough of Sutton to engage with all dog owners of all breeds of dog, encouraging responsible dog ownership. LEAD involves partnership working with key organisations including Sutton Council, the RSPCA and all 34 registered social landlords (RSLs) for the borough. A two-step approach involves working with residents and enforcing the law.

Problem

The irresponsible ownership of dogs is a form of anti-social behaviour (ASB) which can have a significant impact on communities. ASB can include:

- out-of-control dogs being allowed to roam freely unsupervised in the streets with no lead
- persistent dog fouling
- dogs being encouraged to hang from tree branches
- dogs being allowed to enter neighbouring gardens without the permission of the owner of the property
- dogs left in a property or rear garden to bark continuously
- frequent dog on dog/pet attacks which result in injuries to the dogs/pets themselves and humans

This adds a burden on the National Health Service (NHS), local authorities and the police.

Sutton residents had raised many concerns regarding nuisance dogs and ASB involving dogs such as dog attacks, dog fouling and entering gardens. Concerns were expressed through a survey (the intelligence-led neighbourhood security interviews (i-NSI)) which was published by the local authority in conjunction with Cardiff University.

The survey evidence repeated concerns relating to dogs which did not meet the threshold of an offence under dangerous dogs legislation. Concerns were not addressed and a woman was attacked and killed by a dog in Wallington, Sutton in December 2010. This tragic incident raised concerns regarding the recording and sharing of information detailing irresponsible ownership and ASB of dogs.

Response

In response, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) launched the LEAD initiative in Sutton in 2011. The aim was to encourage responsible dog ownership through engagement with dog owners of all breeds, regardless of the social background of owners.

The LEAD initiative was subsequently adopted by eight Borough Command Units (BCUs) and continues to be implemented across the MPS, as well as in other police forces and local authorities across England and Wales.

A key component of LEAD is partnership working and information sharing between police forces, local authorities and RSLs.

The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 was introduced to tackle ASB, including irresponsible dog ownership. This legislation encourages the use of informal interventions in the first instance, prior to more formal measures through the courts.

Without early intervention, there is an increased risk of problems escalating and a higher potential for dog attacks, which can be fatal. Informal measures are not a replacement for situations that meet the necessary thresholds for a complaint under [section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 \(DDA\)](#) or [section 2 of the Dogs Act 1871](#).

By using informal measures where appropriate, action can be taken to address the cause of a problem before a more serious incident occurs, protecting the safety of the public.

LEAD logic model

Problem	<p>Irresponsible ownership of dogs leading to increased anti-social behaviour (ASB) and offences involving dogs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with residents promoted through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regular dog roadshows and press releases • engagement with dog owners during patrols • day-to-day contact with dog owners who come to police attention • Enforcing the law <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-stage letter process: coming to notice letter and LEAD pack. • Risk management processes
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All reports to the police are recorded, regardless of whether they meet the threshold of an offence under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 to create an auditable trail. • Intelligence and crime report checks are carried out over the previous five years to see if the dog or owner have come to the notice of the police previously or if there is a pattern identified in the area. • Early engagement by officers is imperative following a report from a concerned member of the public, alongside information sharing with partners where appropriate.

- Number of local residents upskilled by providing education and training on responsible dog ownership.
- Outputs**
- Number of agencies and external partners engaged in progressing enforcement for anti-social behaviour and offences involving dogs.
 - Intelligence and data gathered on all incidents of anti-social behaviour linked to dogs.
- Outcomes**
- Reduction in criminal and irresponsible actions by individuals with dogs.
 - Increased enforcement action taken where necessary for persistent offenders.
 - Increased resident safety and perception of safety.
- [View logic model as a poster](#)

Implementation

How LEAD works

Part 1: Working with residents

LEAD is a partnership initiative involving several key organisations including Sutton Council, all 34 RSLs for the borough and the RSPCA.

It is promoted through:

- regular dog roadshows and press releases
- social media 'good news' stories
- engagement with dog owners during patrols
- day-to-day contact with owners who come to police attention

This contact includes providing advice and information on dog legislation and dog welfare, encouraging owners (if in social housing) to register their dog(s) with their landlord and to undertake microchipping, which has been a legal requirement since April 2016. The microchipping can be free or at a reduced cost through national dog charities or local veterinary practices.

Part 2: Failure to comply and enforcement

If the owner's dog continues to come to notice for ASB, it may be necessary to consider a community protection notice (CPN) or criminal behaviour order (CBO) application, dog control order (DCO) (section 2 of the Dogs Act 1871) or, where appropriate, a contingent destruction order (CDO) (on conviction under the DDA 1991 or disqualification under this act or under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (AWA)).

By enforcing the law, the aim is to initiate control measures and prosecute offenders when their dog(s) have committed an offence under the DDA 1991 or the AWA 2006 or are prohibited breeds. Where they are linked with ASB, enforcement actions include a two-stage letter process.

The first letter, known as 'coming to notice' letter and 'LEAD (information) pack', includes information on the following.

- The details of the incident that the 'coming to notice' letter relates to – where, when (including the time), why and who.
- ASB warning notice supporting the letter.
- An explanation, where appropriate, that details have been shared with RSLs (if in social housing).
- An explanation, where appropriate, that the information has been shared with the environmental department of the local authority.
- DDA legislation.

Sentencing guidelines on conviction of an offence under the DDA.

LEAD information pack

- LEAD leaflet and introduction to the initiative.
- The Kennel Club Safe and Sound Scheme and Good Citizen Dog Scheme.
- RSPCA leaflets on dealing with care, training and welfare, and behaviour around unfamiliar dogs.
- Other literature including Battersea Dogs and Cats Home breed factsheet, local authority byelaws, dog factors or behaviour and dangerous dogs legislation.

The second letter is hand-delivered by the local Safer Neighbourhoods Team (SNT). Landlords (if the dog owners live in social housing) are made aware and are invited to accompany the SNT during this visit.

The second letter includes details of enforcement, which could be any of the following.

- Acceptable behaviour contracts (ABCs)
- Community protection warnings (CPW) or CPN
- DCO
- CBO

It is imperative that an auditable trail is kept by all partners of the engagement and any action taken and that is shared with partners.

LEAD seeks to achieve several outcomes, which are as follows.

- Actively deal with anti-social and inconsiderate behaviour by individuals with dogs in a way that protects and reassures the public.
- Provide advice to the public on dog issues, improve dog safety and dog welfare in the borough.
- Improve residents' safety and perception of safety.
- Reduce criminal and irresponsible actions by individuals with dogs.
- Engage and deal with the mistreatment and welfare of dogs.
- Proactively intervene with individuals who use dogs to commit crime.
- Proactively and positively promote responsible dog ownership to local residents through education and training.

Information sharing

It is essential that police and their partners log any incidents of negative behaviour. This history is required if enforcement action is needed. When recording this information, best practice is to ensure the following is included.

- Full details of the owner and, where applicable, the person in charge at the time.
- If residing in rented accommodation, who is their housing provider or RSL.
- A detailed account of the incident (where, when, what, why and who).
- Details of the dog or dogs (name, breed, colour, age, neutered or spayed, microchip).

The LEAD initiative recommends that the acronym CANINES is used to ensure detailed and consistent information is included in any reports.

- C – Colour
- A – Age
- N - Name

- I – Ilk (breed and type)
- N – Neutered or spayed
- E – Electronic chip
- S – Sex

Partner response

LEAD encourages partnership and identification of the appropriate partner to take matters forward if required to do so. Partners are asked to share their own engagement and actions with police once they have been provided with copies of police interventions.

RSLs should follow up with a visit or letter within seven working days, reminding the resident of the rules in their tenancy agreement in relation to owning a dog. It will also be outlined to the resident that if the behaviour continues, this could result in their permission (assuming it has already been sought and granted) to have the dog being withdrawn. Ultimately, it could be that RSLs seek repossession of their property due to continued ASB and this is their responsibility to enforce. It is also the RSL's responsibility to keep ASB officers and police up to date of any action that has been taken.

Referrals can be made to the police by the RSPCA. If there are concerns about animal welfare, the police will ask the RSPCA to conduct a joint visit with the SNT. RSPCA literature is included in the LEAD pack provided with the 'coming to notice' letter.

What has been highlighted throughout is the need to record data (crime reports, intelligence reports) and other reporting methods by all partners. The intelligence or information held is required to evidence the need for a CPN/DCO/CBO to deal more effectively with the ongoing ASB by the owner or dog. If they are looking to repossess or serve an environmental order/FPN (due to noise or fouling), partner agencies may request disclosure. All data is marked LEAD.

Engaging and recording at first contact

Under the LEAD initiative, all dog incidents and/or action must be recorded. By engaging and recording at first contact or incident, this reduces and manages risk, safeguards the community, prioritises officer safety for police and partner agencies and the welfare of the dogs.

It also allows for the involvement of external agencies at the first opportunity, including RSLs and the RSPCA. This ensures that responsibilities are shared appropriately and in a timely way across the relevant agencies.

Outcomes and impact

Between implementation in January 2011 and September 2021, the MPS issued 386 letters to dog owners in Sutton. This comprised of 366 first-stage letters and 20 second-stage letters. This resulted in a success rate of 94% through early intervention.

Of the 386 owners who were engaged with, only eight went on to offend under the DDA 1991, a success rate of 98%.

In addition, the following outcomes were observed.

- 35 acceptable behaviour agreements/contracts (ABA or ABC)
- 51 DCOs and CDOs
- 1 injunction (working with a local RSL)
- 6 disqualifications (convictions under the AWA 2006 and DDA 1991)
- 2 CPNs
- 8 ASB warning notices
- 15 LEAD roadshow days (Riverside Animal Centre, Dogs Trust and RSLs)
- Over 700 dogs microchipped
- An increase in the use of other ASB tools from the ASB Toolkit in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014

LEAD is a continuing practice between MPS and partnership agencies. In 2023, CONNECT was introduced to the MPS as an IT system linking crime, intelligence, safeguarding and anti-social behaviour reports. The system allows officers to record, document and highlight intervention which has been offered through an orders and intervention tab for the offender. This allows for all LEAD-related documentation to be found in one place.

Members of the public have provided positive feedback in response to the LEAD initiative. Anecdotal feedback from local residents has revealed that they feel like something is being done, despite incidents not reaching the threshold of a criminal offence. RSLs have provided positive feedback for the initiative as well as their tenants.

Furthermore, SNTs have delivered presentations at Neighbourhood Watch events, where local residents have expressed that they feel reassured and safer as a result of the implementation of LEAD.

LEAD has raised the profile of the MPS on all dog-related issues and is now being implemented in eight of the 12 BCUs. LEAD will eventually be implemented across all BCUs across London.

In partnership with Surrey Police, Surrey County Council has piloted the initiative in the three boroughs of Mole Valley, Runnymede and Surrey Heath.

Thames Valley Police and Slough Council have implemented the use of LEAD since 2013.

Hertfordshire Police and Stevenage Borough Council adopted and launched LEAD in Stevenage and East Hertfordshire in June 2015.

The LEAD initiative was implemented across all six North Wales Police counties in 2015, in partnership with Wrexham, Gwynedd, Conwy, Isle of Anglesey, Flintshire and Denbighshire county councils. Gwent Police have also implemented LEAD across the whole of its force area and South Wales Police are intending to do the same in 2025. Many other organisations have requested information on the implementation of LEAD.

Learning and recommendations

It is important that information sharing agreements are in place so that proactive sharing of information can be carried out by all partners involved in the implementation of LEAD.

In the early days of implementing LEAD, police research highlighted that some partners kept no records of dog-related incidents and social housing providers were unable to identify how many dogs were in their properties. Some social housing providers tried to use their own enforcement legislation to force their tenants to rehome their pets by stating they had no record of the tenants having or requesting a dog to be kept in their properties.

Following the sharing of a 'coming to notice' letter, police highlighted that the social housing providers had not kept appropriate records. Actions in relation to enforcement had been disproportionate in cases where tenants provided proof that permission had been sought to keep the dog in their property.

An agreement was made that, should a dog come to the notice of police, those in social housing would be given the opportunity to sign up to a pet agreement with their housing provider. One social housing provider in Sutton trained their staff in the application of microchipping dogs, which they

offer as a free or heavily reduced cost incentive. Tenants supply the details of their pets using the acronym CANINES, supported by an evidential photograph of the dog.

During the early implementation of LEAD, concerns were raised as partners were initiating action independently without sharing information with the police. In response, the police ensured partners that they would be kept informed throughout the LEAD process, while stressing the importance of proactive sharing of information to ensure a consistent and appropriate response. Any action beyond LEAD is up to the partners, but it is imperative that the initiative is police led and early sharing is prioritised consistently.

Police reporting and recording systems differ across police forces. Therefore the recording of ASB in relation to the irresponsible ownership of dogs can be inconsistent. For LEAD to work effectively, there is a need for information to be recordable and traceable. However, to employ new digital software comes at a significant cost. As a result of this, the LEAD initiative was developed and adapted to be flexible to the systems already available to police forces across England and Wales.

The two-letter process does not require stringent formality and is flexible. Where there is a need for enforcement, it can be taken at any point should there be escalation of ASB or possible offences related to negative behaviour of a dog; or lack of action by an irresponsible owner.

The LEAD 'coming to notice' letter format should shadow the letters used by other forces that have implemented the initiative. This ensures continuity and reflection of the education of legislation around the DDA 1991 and sentencing guidelines on conviction.

The 'coming to notice' letters provide an auditable trail of engagement and intervention. They can be used by police and partners as evidence in courts or other legal settings.

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Tags

Community engagement Neighbourhood policing