

Dog kennelling demand reduction programme

A partnership approach to reduce dangerous dogs kennel occupancy by improving the quality of dangerous dog investigations and animal welfare.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Criminal justice Investigation Productivity
Organisation	Greater Manchester Police
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Region	North West
Partners	Police Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Private sector
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2025

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Communities General public Offenders Victims Workforce

Aim

The aims of the dog kennelling demand reduction programme are to:

- seize dangerous dogs being held in kennels
- manage future increases in demand arising from dangerous dog legislation
- deliver consistent, high-quality investigations through improved information gathering and specialist support
- support criminal justice outcomes through closer partnership working with His Majesty's Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS), the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and legal services

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the dog kennelling demand reduction programme are to:

- reduce the number of dangerous dogs held in kennels
- reduce the average kennel occupancy and length of stay for seized dogs
- increase dangerous dog enforcement activity while reducing organisational demand
- improve the animal welfare outcomes for seized dogs
- increase the speed of case progression through investigations and court processes
- increase the number of cases resolved through efficient legal and disposal processes
- improve the quality and consistency of dangerous dog investigations
- increase the number of opportunities for suitable dogs to be managed safely outside kennels through risk-assessed alternatives

Description

Following changes to XL Bully legislation and an increase in dangerous dog investigations, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) experienced unprecedented demand on the dog legislation officer (DLO). At its peak, approximately 220 seized dogs were being held in kennels at any one time, resulting in annual costs of more than £1 million. This placed additional administrative pressure on the force and raised concerns about animal welfare and delays within the criminal justice system.

The DLO undertook a review of kennel occupancy, investigation processes, and criminal justice outcomes to identify the factors driving demand. The review included:

- process mapping
- demand analysis
- cost-benefit assessment
- engaging with partners across the criminal justice system

The review identified that seized dogs were often remaining in kennels for extended periods because of delays in investigations, court proceedings, and disposal decisions.

To address these issues, the DLO developed a multi-agency improvement programme involving:

- GMP solicitors
- criminal justice branch
- CPS
- HMCTS
- dog unit
- external kennel providers

Senior support was obtained through GMP governance processes and legal oversight was provided throughout the development of the initiative.

In response, GMP created a dedicated dog legislation court within Tameside Magistrates' Court. In collaboration with the force's legal services, HMCTS and CPS, the DLO established a specialist court process. This was designed to improve understanding of the legislation, reduce unnecessary adjournments and achieve faster case outcomes.

The DLO also designed and implemented an interim exemption scheme. The purpose of the scheme is to enable low-risk prohibited dogs to be returned to their owners before the conclusion of court proceedings. This is subject to:

- a comprehensive risk assessment
- evaluation of the owner and home environment
- legal oversight
- senior officer authorisation.

In addition, formal management conditions have been introduced to ensure public safety is maintained.

The programme has also introduced a force-wide seizure process. The process requires gathering the following information at the point of seizure:

- recording of owner details
- consideration of alternative arrangements
- early identification of disclaimer opportunities
- consulting with DLO specialists

The DLO also introduced enhanced support for investigating officers by providing:

- specialist advice
- case reviews
- investigative guidance
- assistance with court file preparation

The programme has been delivered using existing resources and partnership arrangements, with no additional dedicated funding required. Alongside the operational changes, the DLO worked closely with kennel providers to improve occupancy management, reduce unnecessary kennel stays, and ensure resources were used efficiently.

The initiative has been embedded within business-as-usual activity. It provides a framework for managing demand associated with dangerous dog legislation while maintaining public safety, improving animal welfare, and reducing costs.

Overall impact

The number of dogs held in kennels has reduced by approximately 70% (from 220 to 59) following implementation of the programme. This was achieved while increasing enforcement activity, with dog seizures rising from an average of 50 to 76 per month.

The programme has generated potential savings of approximately £1 million per year through reduced kennel occupancy and more efficient management of dangerous dog cases. Improvements to investigation processes, specialist support, and information gathering have reduced case delays and improved outcomes.

The introduction of the dedicated dog legislation court has improved consistency, reduced unnecessary adjournments, and increased understanding of dangerous dog legislation among criminal justice partners. The interim exemption scheme has also enabled suitable low-risk dogs to be managed safely outside kennels, improving animal welfare while maintaining public safety through robust risk assessment and management conditions.

Feedback from officers, investigators, and partner agencies has been positive. Many have welcomed the improved access to specialist advice, clearer processes, and faster case progression. GMP's partnership working with the CPS, HMCTS, the force's legal services and kennel providers has improved collective problem-solving.

Learning

- A main learning point has been that demand reduction can be achieved through system redesign rather than by reducing enforcement activity. Initial concerns focused on kennel capacity and increasing costs. However, detailed analysis showed that many of the underlying issues lay within processes, information flows, and criminal justice delays, rather than in the volume of seizures alone.
- Partnership working has been vital to the success of the programme. Early engagement with partners enabled the development of coordinated solutions. The establishment of the dedicated dog legislation court demonstrated the value of involving criminal justice partners from the outset and developing a shared understanding of the problem.
- The programme also highlighted the importance of gathering the right information at the earliest opportunity. Introducing mandatory information-gathering processes and specialist consultation at the point of seizure reduced delays later in investigations and enabled more informed decision-making.

- A challenge during implementation was changing established working practices and developing confidence in new approaches, particularly in relation to the interim exemption scheme. This required comprehensive risk assessment processes, legal oversight, and clear governance arrangements to ensure public safety remained the priority. Once embedded, the programme demonstrated that alternative approaches could safely reduce kennel occupancy while improving animal welfare outcomes.
- Another learning point was the value of specialist support. Providing investigators with ongoing advice, case reviews and guidance has improved the consistency and quality of investigations and reduced avoidable delays.
- For organisations considering a similar approach, it is essential to understand the entire end-to-end process before implementing solutions. Conducting a demand analysis, process mapping and partnership engagement were essential in identifying opportunities for improvement. The focus should be placed on addressing root causes of demand, embedding sustainable processes and balancing efficiency with public safety and animal welfare considerations.

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