

SI0426

Dangerous Dogs

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This document provides instruction to PSNI Officers and Staff regarding legally defined Dangerous Dogs or where dogs present a danger. The document outlines legislation together with PSNI and other agencies responsibilities.

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1. Introduction

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is committed to fulfilling its core policing responsibilities under [Section 32 Police \(NI\) Act 2000](#) and adhering to [Article 2 of European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#) in Protecting Life with regards to the risks posed by Dangerous Dogs. In doing this, decisions will incorporate Human Rights law and principles and be guided by the National Decision Model. In completing this responsibility the PSNI is committed to the humane management of dogs that it comes into contact with.

When referring to Dangerous Dogs in this document the term will be taken to mean dogs that are:

- Dangerous as defined in [Art 25A The Dogs \(NI\) Order 1983](#) – responsibility of Council Dog Enforcement Officer;
- Presenting a danger to the public – responsibility of Council Dog Enforcement Officer (responsibility of PSNI if immediate threat or danger); and
- Presenting a danger to PSNI Officers and Staff – this includes in the execution of their duties and functions.

2. Aims

This Document aims to:

- Define Dangerous Dogs;
- Outline PSNI responsibilities;
- Outline Council Dog Enforcement Officer responsibilities;
- Describe relevant offences and the responsible agency;
- Outline Banned Breed legislation; and
- Provide structure for Officers and Staff likely to come into contact or be involved in incidents with Dangerous dogs.

Please note that this document does not replace [Service Instruction SI0916 – Animals and Wildlife](#). The PSNI Wildlife and Animal Welfare Officer remains the central point of contact within the Police Service of Northern Ireland advising on all issues relating to wildlife, animal crime and welfare that require Police investigation.

The PSNI Wildlife and Animal Welfare Officer is also the PSNI point of contact to liaise with outside statutory and voluntary bodies involved in the area of animal welfare / wildlife crime.

Contact between the PSNI and outside agencies **must** be through the PSNI Wildlife and Animal Welfare Officer or Wildlife Office.

3. Definitions and Legislation

Dangerous Dogs
<p>The Dogs (NI) Order 1983 defines Dangerous Dogs as “dogs bred for fighting”.</p> <p>25A – (1) This Article applies to:</p>
<p>a) Any dog of the type known as the pit bull terrier;</p>
<p>b) Any dog of the type known as the Japanese Tosa; and</p>
<p>c) Any dog of the type designated for the purposes of this article by an order of the Department, being a type appearing to the department to be bred for fighting or to have the characteristics of a type bred for that purpose. Currently:</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogo Argentino;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fila Brasileiro; and
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XL Bully <p>After 31st December 2024 it is illegal to own an XL Bully dog in Northern Ireland without an Exemption Certificate.</p>

XL Bully
<p>From 31st December 2024 it is illegal to:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breed, sell or rehome an XL Bully dog;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give an XL Bully away or to abandon it;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have an XL Bully un-muzzled or off the lead in a public space;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let an XL Bully stray;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not keeping an XL Bully in a secure place; and

- Own an XL Bully dog in NI without an exemption certificate.

Conditions for exemption include;

- Keeping the dog at the same address at all times (except for 30 days a year to allow for holidays etc.);
- Notifying the relevant council of any permanent change of address;
- Ensuring requirements for insurance;
- Neutering and microchipping requirements are all met;
- Ensuring that the dog is on a lead and muzzled in a public place; and
- That the dog is kept in secure conditions.

Under [The Dogs \(NI\) Order 1983](#) “an Officer” is referring to a Council Dog Enforcement Officer who has a statutory obligation for enforcement and administration.

The PSNI have no statutory obligation under The Dogs (NI) Order 1983 for enforcement and involvement is limited to

incidents involving immediate risk to life or immediate danger to the public.

Dogs Presenting a Danger to the Public and / or Officers / Staff

Dog breeds outside of those legally defined as Dangerous Dogs may still pose a risk to the Public and Police Officers / Staff, dependant on the individual dog and the circumstances it is in. The following are potential exhibitors of a dog in a stressed state and therefore potentially more likely to pose a danger:

- Distance Increasing Behaviours;
- Turning head and / or body away;
- Licking lips or nose or yawning outside of context that this behaviour would be expected (for example; waking up, drinking or eating);
- Baring of teeth, growling or snapping air;
- Frozen / rigid posture; and
- Actively attacking (contact with person need not occur but the potential to is present).

The above list is not exhaustive and Officers / Staff should consider any other

potential indications / factors in assessing the potential risk posed.

The presence of a dog in itself does not mean the dog is dangerous and the above exhibitors should be considered in addition to the wider situational context with professional judgement, experience and other factors included in the Officers / Staff members decision making of what risk a dog presents.

In addition, if Police actions (for example a house search with a dog present) are likely to increase the dog's stress levels and cannot be avoided, Officers / Staff should consider the risk a dog presents and include it in their decision making. Further information can be found in [Chapter 8 – Operational Policy](#).

4. Council Dog Enforcement Officer (Dog Warden) Responsibilities

Council Dog Enforcement Officers (Dog Wardens) are responsible for the majority of dog related incidents.

Dog Enforcement Officers operate under the following legislation:

- [The Dog \(NI\) Order 1983](#);
- [The Dangerous Dogs \(NI\) Order 1991](#);
- [The Dangerous Dogs \(Designated Types\) Order \(NI\) 2024](#); and
- [The Dangerous Dogs \(Compensation and Exemption Scheme\) Order \(NI\) 2024](#).

The above legislation applies to District Councils and therefore the Council Dog Enforcement Officer. Offences under the above legislation are investigated by Dog Enforcement Officers. These include:

- [The Dogs \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1983](#);
 - Art 22 (Penalty for Dog Straying);
 - Art 25A (Dog Bred for Fighting);
 - Art 28 (Attacks on Livestock); and
 - Art 29 (Attacks on persons).

Council Dog Enforcement Officers can be contacted through Call Management Centres (CMC). Council Dog Enforcement

Officers are responsible for investigating dog attacks. However where there is an ongoing risk to public safety (such as an ongoing dog attack) PSNI can assist by responding to the incident in order to protect life and/or prevent serious harm.

Please note that a Council Dog Enforcement Officer (Dog Warden) is not the same as a Council Animal Welfare Officer.

Under [Section 4 of the Welfare of Animals \(NI\) Act 2011](#), unnecessary suffering and other welfare concerns are investigated by Council Animal Welfare Officers. This includes offences involving domestic pets of any vertebrate species (including dogs).

Council Dog Enforcement Officers are responsible for investigating dog attacks. However where there is an ongoing risk to public safety (such as an ongoing dog attack) PSNI can assist by responding to the incident in order to protect life and/or prevent serious harm.

5. PSNI Responsibilities

The PSNI are responsible for taking control of dogs that are presenting an immediate threat to life or immediate danger to the public.

Council Dog Enforcement Officers are responsible for investigating dog attacks. However where there is an ongoing risk to public safety (such as an ongoing dog attack) PSNI can assist by responding to the incident in order to protect life and/or prevent serious harm.

Once the immediate threat or danger is removed Council Dog Enforcement Officers are then responsible for the seizure of the dog. Unless there is a specific reason, dogs can be transported through their service provider and this will be arranged by the Dog Enforcement Officer.

The PSNI are the sole legislative authority responsible for investigating and prosecuting 'fighting' offences as set out in [Section 8 of the Welfare of Animals Act \(NI\) 2011](#) and this can include an organised dog fight. For advice and guidance please contact the PSNI Service Wildlife and

Animal Welfare department. Council dog Enforcement Officers, Council Animal Welfare Officers or non-statutory organisations should not be contacted in a scenario like this unless advised to do so by the Wildlife and Animal Welfare Office.

Council Dog Enforcement Officers are responsible for breeding establishment licensing and Council Animal Welfare Officers are responsible for any welfare concerns. The PSNI may have an input in incidents involving illegal dog breeding establishments when there are links to organised crime and economic crime. Please consult the Wildlife and Animal Welfare Office for advice and guidance when required.

Seizures by PSNI

Seizures by PSNI should only be considered as a last resort when other options have been exhausted. As the PSNI Wildlife and Welfare Office manage the contract for all seizures they must be made aware of any:

- Planned searches / activities involving the potential removal / seizure of dogs; and

- Seizure of a dog prior to the seizing or as soon as possible afterwards.

To seize an animal the Investigating Officer (IO) can contact the PSNI's contracted service provider through CMC or details can be found on [PSNI Wildlife and Animal Welfare Service Instruction](#). Officers must complete a W1 Seizure Notice and e-mail it to zWildlife within 12 hours of seizure. It is the IO's responsibility to act as the liaison between the service provider and the owner until the case has concluded. Advice can be sought from the Wildlife and Animal Welfare Office but it is not their role to take forward.

Seized Dogs should not be taken to Police Stations.

The PSNI Wildlife and Animal Welfare Office is there to act as a central point of contact within the PSNI advising on all issues relating to wildlife / animal crime and welfare that require Police investigation.

6. Dog Section

The PSNI Dog Section's primary role is the care and deployment of PSNI Operational Dogs on a 24/7 basis.

In addition to this Dog Handlers are trained in the Canine Risk Management Course which is further supported by the issuing of additional equipment to manage Dangerous Dogs. Therefore Dog Section are able to assist in an incident with a Dangerous Dog or a dog presenting a danger to the Public and / or Officer / Staff.

Spontaneous Incidents

Dog Section should be tasked to spontaneous incidents by Contact Management Centre (CMC) / Incident Co-Ordination Centre (ICC). The deployment of Dog Handlers is to be managed by CMC / ICC / Dog Section and in line with existing operational deployment procedures

Pre-planned Occurrences

Dog Section should be tasked by way of a Niche bid to Operational Support Department (OSD) Hub with sufficient details for adequate resourcing of the request.

An Officer or Unit requesting Dog Handlers assistance should refer to [Chapter 3 – Definitions and Legislation](#) for a list of Dangerous Dogs, potential indicators and as a minimum should seek to provide; the number of dogs, sizes and types (if known), the layout of the premises and any information known on a dog's behaviour.

It should be noted that not every occurrence with a dog present requires support from Dog Section and Chapter 3 – Definitions and Legislation should be referred to.

Dog Section can be contacted for advice on Pre-planned requests.

The role of a Dog Handler is **Not To:**

- Provide advice on the welfare of an animal;
- Identify a breed of a dog;
- Investigate offences involving dogs;
or
- Transport dogs.

7. Offences

Offences Investigated by PSNI (fighting, etc.)

[Section 8 of the Welfare of Animals \(NI\) Act 2011:](#)

8 (1) – A person commits an offence if that person:

- a) Causes an animal fight to take place, or attempts to do so;
- b) Knowingly receives money for admission to an animal fight;
- c) Knowingly publicises a proposed animal fight;
- d) Provides information about an animal fight to another with the intention of enabling or encouraging attendance at the fight;
- e) Makes or accepts a bet on the outcome of an animal fight or on the likelihood of anything occurring or not occurring in the course of an animal fight;
- f) Takes part in an animal fight;
- g) Owns or has in his or her possession anything designed or adapted for use in connection with an animal fight with the intention of its being so used;
- h) Keeps or trains an animal for use in connection with an animal fight; or
- i) Keeps, uses or manages, or permits or assists in the keeping or use or management of, any premises for use for an animal fight.

8. Operational Policing

Operational Police Officers and Staff should adhere to the National Police Chief Council (NPCC) National Decision Model in taking a simple, logical and evidence based approach to decision making when interacting with dogs. This includes Officers / Staff assessing risk based on a dog's behaviours, Police Operational Actions and Operational Environment.

Appendix A – Roles and Responsibilities

	Council Dog Enforcement Officers (Dog Warden)	Council Animal Welfare Officers	Police Service of Northern Ireland	PSNI Wildlife and Welfare Office
<u>Responsible For</u>	<p>The majority of dog related incidents. (Excludes fighting offences). Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licenses (includes suspension and registration); • Control of dogs; • Destruction of dogs; • Breeding offences; and 	<p>Unnecessary suffering and any / other welfare concerns.</p>	<p>Taking control of dogs that are presenting an immediate threat to life or immediate danger to the public.</p> <p>Investigating and prosecuting ‘fighting’ offences, including an organised dog fight.</p> <p>Council Dog Enforcement Officers are responsible for investigating dog attacks. However where there is an ongoing risk to public safety (such as</p>	<p>A central point of contact within the PSNI advising on all issues relating to wildlife / animal crime and welfare that require Police investigation.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enforcement / Other <p>(The Dogs NI Order 1983).</p>		<p>an ongoing dog attack) PSNI can assist by responding to the incident in order to protect life and/or prevent serious harm.</p>	
			<p>When there are links to organised crime and economic crime - PSNI may have an input in incidents involving illegal dog breeding establishments.</p>	
<u>Seizures</u>	As per agencies responsibilities and procedures – Not to be actioned by	As per agencies responsibilities and	Only considered as a last resort when other options have been exhausted.	Manages the contract for all seizures.

Corporate Policy | Service Instruction

	PSNI Officers.	procedures – Not to be actioned by PSNI Officers.	Investigating Officer (IO) must notify the Wildlife and Animal Welfare Officer. Complete a W1 Seizure Notice.	Provides advice on seizures - It is not their role to take them forward.
			IO act as the liaison between the service provider and the owner until the case has concluded.	
<u>Legislation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Dog (NI) Order 1983; • The Dangerous Dogs (NI) Order 1991; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 4 of the Welfare of Animals (NI) Act 2011. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 8 of the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) Order (NI) 2024; 			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Dangerous Dogs (Compensation and Exemption Scheme) Order (NI) 2024. 			
<p><u>Contact</u></p>	<p>Contacted through Call Management Centres (CMC).</p>			

Appendix B – Contact Us

Service Instruction Author

Operational Support Department

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