



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee

Thursday 21 February 2019

Session 5



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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PUBLIC AUDIT AND POST-LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
5th Meeting 2019, Session 5

CONVENER

*Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

*Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)

*Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)

*Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Claire Booth

Gemma Cooper (NFU Scotland)

Dr Alasdair Corfield (Royal College of Emergency Medicine)

Natalie Crawford (Radio Clyde News)

Melissa Donald (British Veterinary Association Scottish Branch)

Dr Judy Evans (Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh)

Mike Flynn (Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals)

Lisa Grady

Dave Joyce (Communication Workers Union)

John Lynch

Veronica Lynch

Alison Robertson (National Dog Warden Association (Scotland))

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Lucy Scharbert

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee

Thursday 21 February 2019

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:04]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Jenny Marra): Good morning and welcome to the fifth meeting in 2019 of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee. I ask everyone in the public gallery to please switch their electronic devices to silent, so that they do not affect the committee's work.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking business in private. Do members agree to take items 3 and 4 in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010: Post-legislative Scrutiny

09:04

The Convener: Item 2 is our post-legislative scrutiny of the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010. We have two panels. I welcome our first panel of witnesses and thank them for coming to the committee meeting. We really appreciate it.

The purpose of the evidence session is to hear directly from people who have been affected by dog attacks or who have knowledge about the impact of such attacks, and to hear about the action that has been taken by the relevant authorities—whether it is the police or councils—and what changes to the law are needed.

As usual, MSPs will ask witnesses questions, but witnesses can also ask questions of each other. We want to retain some structure to the discussion, so if anyone wants to speak, I would appreciate it if they could indicate by catching my eye or by attracting the attention of Lucy Scharbert, who will tell me. When witnesses speak, their microphones will be activated automatically, so there is no need to touch the button panel in front of them.

I ask everyone to introduce themselves. I am the convener of the committee and an MSP for North East Scotland.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I am also an MSP for the North East Scotland region, and I am the deputy convener of the committee.

Claire Booth: I am Claire Booth. In 2015, my six-year-old son was mauled by two English bull terriers.

Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I am the MSP for Airdrie and Shotts, and I introduced the bill that became the 2010 act.

Dr Judy Evans (Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh): I am a plastic surgeon and live in Plymouth, but I am the honorary secretary of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, and I represent plastic surgeons for the college, which is, of course, an international college.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I am an MSP for the Glasgow region.

Natalie Crawford (Radio Clyde News): I am a broadcast journalist at Radio Clyde, and I started the lead the way campaign.

Veronica Lynch: I am Veronica Lynch. My daughter, Kellie, was killed by Rottweiler dogs in 1989.

John Lynch: I am Kellie's father.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I am the MSP for Midlothian North and Musselburgh.

Dr Alasdair Corfield (Royal College of Emergency Medicine): I am a consultant in emergency medicine in accident and emergency departments in Paisley. I am representing the Royal College of Emergency Medicine.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I am the MSP for Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley.

Lisa Grady: I am Lisa Grady. My daughter was attacked by two Rottweilers in 2010.

Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): I am an MSP for the North East Scotland region.

The Convener: The other people who are sitting at the table are parliamentary staff, who will assist the committee's meeting.

Would any of the witnesses who have come to give evidence like to go first? Perhaps Natalie Crawford would like to talk about her campaign, and then I will ask our other witnesses to give evidence.

Natalie Crawford: The lead the way campaign started about 18 months ago, following a series of freedom of information requests to national health service boards across Scotland that showed that, every year, thousands of people—and hundreds of children—still go to emergency departments across Scotland with dog attack injuries. I have the figures for last year, which I believe the committee will not have seen, because they were not included in my written submission. Last year, in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, 1,417 people—255 of whom were children—presented at accident and emergency departments with injuries related to dog attacks. The figure for NHS Lanarkshire was 912, and it was 439 for NHS Ayrshire and Arran. Last year's figures for NHS Lanarkshire and NHS Ayrshire and Arran were at a four-year high.

Following the findings of the freedom of information requests, we submitted further FOIs to local authorities. Alarming, we found that no dog control notices were issued in Glasgow during an entire three-year period. Only one part-time animal control warden was employed, and they were not trained in the dog control legislation. I understand that that has changed and that there is now one full-time dog control warden, but I am sure that you will agree that that is not nearly enough for Glasgow, the largest local authority.

The Convener: Thank you. I will invite you to come back in later. Would any of the other witnesses like to tell their story?

Claire Booth: In 2015, my son Ryan, who was six at the time, a couple of his school friends, another two mums and I went for a walk near to where we live on a semi-rural country lane with houses on it. We were all being very quiet, because we were intent on picking chestnuts off the ground, when from nowhere, a white English bull terrier came running out of the trees and knocked Ryan to the ground. The dog covered his whole body, and it was followed very quickly by another English bull terrier, which ran right into him, too. It all happened very quickly.

The scene was carnage. A man who lived in one of the houses nearby came out to help us get the dogs off, and when we did so, we noticed right away that Ryan's ear was off the side of his head. A large chunk was missing and the ear was hanging off. Obviously I was screaming hysterically, while the owner was in the background, unaware of what was going on and shouting out, "Don't worry—the dogs won't touch you." There was blood everywhere, and children were running about screaming, as they would be.

The situation quickly escalated. We called the police and an ambulance, Ryan was blue-lighted to the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley and the police began to deal with the incident. I was with Ryan the whole time at hospital. When we arrived at Paisley, we were told that we had go straight to the children's hospital in Glasgow, and we were blue-lighted there instead. Ryan had emergency surgery to attach his ear to his head and close up the wounds, but the top of his ear could not be reattached, because there are no blood vessels in that part of the body. As a result, he was left disfigured. He had bites to his hip and elbow, teeth marks embedded in the top of his forehead and cuts and grazes all over his body from being dragged about the ground.

After the trauma of the attack, I was left frustrated because I felt that the police were not helping us out. At the time, the police took statements from my friends who had been there, but they were trying to get and contain their own kids and did not fully see what was going on. The police decided at the scene to retain one dog, which was white and covered in blood; they did not retain the other one, because they said that there was not sufficient evidence that it had actually bitten my son. However, because both dogs covered Ryan's full body, you could not actually see which of them was doing the biting. They knew that the white one was involved only because you could see the blood all over it; the other dog was dark brown and black, so you would not have been able to see bloodstains on it.

The owner of the dogs said that he would give the white dog over, because it had behavioural issues, particularly with pram wheels, bike wheels

and car wheels. Whenever it came into close contact with those things, it went berserk. My friend had a nine-month-old in a pram, and Ryan was standing next to it, but that is the only indication that I have had as to why he got picked. He regularly asks me, "Why did the dog attack me and no one else? I wasn't running about, shouting or screaming." He was doing none of the things that people say not to do when a dog runs up to you.

I was very frustrated with the police, and I let them know my frustrations. I did not get my statement taken until later on that night, and they did not want to speak to Ryan at all. He was the victim—he was the one who was lying on the ground—and so he should have been the one to tell them what had happened. I and my husband ended up writing to an MSP, Annabel Goldie, who lived—and still lives—in the area, and she put a complaint into the Renfrewshire police. As a result of that, things were escalated, and we were visited by the police, who stated why they had no control over these things. Basically, they told us that they had no authority to do anything when dogs attack people. They badly wanted to retain the other dog, but they had no control over that. Because of that, I have put more complaints into the police, but we have not really got too far with that.

We were also visited by the dog wardens. They took a statement from us, but a week later, they phoned to ask whether they had left the statement at our house, because they could not find it. That, too, was a huge frustration. I phoned them back to see whether they had found it; apparently they had, but I do not know that for sure. I felt that that whole process was a bit farcical, to be honest.

The dog owner was charged and taken to court, and the white dog was taken away and destroyed. The second dog was given a control order, which meant that it could not be walked where we live in Bishopton, it could not be off a lead, it had to be muzzled and if anyone came to the door—whether they were a postman, someone with a delivery or a member of the public—it had to be contained. It could not be anywhere near the front door or in any public places in Bishopton, but the owner moved away to a completely different area. Nobody knew where he had gone, so the control order was never followed up and the dog wardens could not get hold of him to do the six-monthly check that they were supposed to do.

09:15

The dog owner himself was given the maximum community service, and the judge said that he was very close to being jailed. I felt that he should have been jailed, because he was a very irresponsible owner, but he escaped a jail sentence because he handed over the white dog.

What are my feelings about what the law should be? Too many dog owners in this country act as if their dog were a baby or a child—an extension of their family. I understand that to a certain extent, but too many people have dogs that they cannot control. Those dogs should not be pets, should not be in houses and should not be left with children. I would like to see dogs being kept on leads in all public places—it happens in other countries, so why not here? My son cannot go to public parks now, because everywhere we go he is terrified of seeing a dog off the lead. He has needed more counselling as a result, which is something that we are trying to solve as a family.

I also feel that the people should not have these kinds of dogs—there should be controls on them and stricter guidelines on the repercussions of dog attacks. I am very strongly against the one free bite rule. How do we know whether a dog has bitten before? People in the community where the brown dog is now living do not know what has happened or what the dog has been involved in. Why should we let that happen? Also, all owners should pay for a licence to have a dog. They should not be able to go on Facebook or Gumtree and buy a dog, or get it for nothing, without knowing anything about it.

The trauma for my family is on-going. Ryan has been left with a disfigurement. He will have to undergo another three operations to remove cartilage from his sternum, attach it to his ear and rebuild his ear with a skin graft. Those will be three separate operations in Edinburgh; we live in Bishopton, so it is a bit of an upheaval for us. There has been a traumatic effect on his entire childhood: he does not want to go to places where he should be striving to go as a little boy. It has affected our younger children, who were not there at the time but now have a huge fear of dogs. It has affected me, too: I had a lot of time off work, I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and had to go through cognitive behavioural therapy. All of that treatment is funded by the NHS. Why should that strain have to be put on the NHS because of one irresponsible person who should not have owned those dogs?

The Convener: Claire, thank you very much indeed. I know that it is not easy to recount these stories, but it is important that we hear your evidence today.

Veronica, would you like to go next?

Veronica Lynch: I will start off by saying that I agree entirely with everything that has just been said. When Kellie died, the laws were ineffective: nothing happened to anybody. The owner stupidly allowed his daughter and my daughter to take out two massive Rottweilers with a combined weight of something like 19 stone. Kellie weighed something like 4.5 stone, so she did not stand a

chance. The injuries that Kellie suffered were such that when we went to see her, we were not allowed to touch her; it was not until much later that we realised that she had actually been decapitated.

I think that all dogs should be kept on a lead. There should be some kind of measure or law on keeping more powerful dogs, because not everybody can control the bigger dogs. When extending leads are used in public places, they should be a maximum of 2 metres long, just for safety. There should be dog runs in parks, where people can take their dogs; children could be kept out of them, to keep them safe.

That is me for now, but there is a lot more to be said.

The Convener: Thank you very much. Just tell me if you would like to come back in, Veronica.

Dr Evans: I have a picture that shows a small child who got a facial dog bite; maybe it should be shown or maybe it should not. The bite was regarded as a minor injury because, as plastic surgeons, we could take that child into theatre and repair the damage—from the point of view of there being no open wound—in an operation that lasted less than an hour. Technically, the child recovered from the anaesthetic and was allowed to go home the same day. However, that was not a minor injury. The child had scarring. It is a myth among the public that children scar better than older people. The situation is exactly the opposite. Those of us who are old enough know that we have facial creases that can hide scars. Children who still have to grow have worse scars, because their tissues are actively growing, which means that their scar tissue is actively growing, too. Children will get worse scars, even with the best plastic surgery. That is a huge problem for the child concerned.

For every child who comes into the plastic surgeon's with a dog bite injury—or any other injury—there will be not just one patient; there will be at least five. There will be parents, and perhaps grandparents, too. The dog might not have been running wild. It might have been at home, where the grandparents were caring for it. The dog might never previously have bitten anybody. Such terrible situations affect the inter-family dynamics, and the effect continues for the rest of the child's life and the rest of the family's life. I would say that a dog bite is very rarely a minor injury, even if it is not life threatening.

As plastic surgeons, we try to do everything that we can to support the families, and we do what we can to pass on our concerns to other agencies. However, such children come in only as day cases, and we have to move on to deal with the next day's day cases. We do not do enough, but

that is not because of a lack of wanting to do more. Obviously, we are not the people who are responsible for controlling the dogs. We are the people who have to mop up the terrible things that happen because there is a lack of control.

The Convener: Dr Evans, you represent the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh as well as being a consultant plastic surgeon, so you are able to speak on behalf of surgeons across Scotland. We understand that there has been an increase in dog attacks. Have your surgeons seen an increase in the number of operations that they are doing as a result of dog attacks?

Dr Evans: I cannot give you any absolute numbers, but junior plastic surgeons look for hot topics to do projects on to find out such figures. I would say that the situation is the same across the whole of the United Kingdom. I also have papers from Australia that show that dog attacks are becoming more frequent there. Roughly, hospital admissions as a result of dog attacks have doubled in the UK in the past 10 years.

The Convener: Do you have any evidence on why that is?

Dr Evans: Not in terms of validated figures, but my impression is that there is less control in the home as far as children are concerned. Sometimes, people are having to go out to work and are leaving dogs inappropriately; dogs are being left with people who are not physically fit to control them. Claire Booth mentioned the one free bite rule, but even a no bite rule does not mean that a dog is not going to get frustrated and attack somebody one day. I do not think that a dog can ever be trusted just because it has not done anything so far.

Lisa Grady: My daughter was attacked by two Rottweilers in 2010, when she was 10 years old. She was out riding her bike and she stopped to cross the road. Three Rottweilers—two adults and a puppy—came round the corner. She smiled at the puppy; a person in the street had owned this dog and had given it back to the people she had bought it from, as it was showing aggression towards her son. The next thing, the dogs grabbed Rhianna off her bike and started biting her. She managed to get back to her feet two or three times, but the dogs pulled her down again.

This all happened in the middle of a road. My mum saw it from the window, and she came running down and said to the dogs, "Be good!" For some reason, perhaps because they were used to female authority, they stopped. My mum got Rhianna in a dressing gown and walked her back across to her house, which was about 20 yards away. Rhianna was saying "My jaw's broken," and, "My leg, my leg!" The dogs followed them all the

way back to the house and were trying to look through the windows.

My niece, who was there at the time, phoned the police and was told that she would have to phone the dog wardens. It was only after she explained to the police how bad Rhianna's injuries looked that they told her to phone an ambulance, which she did. We think that the Ambulance Service contacted the police, because both turned up at the same time. Rhianna's clothes had to be cut off. She had bites to the top of her arm, at the front and back. She had a big bite to her leg. Her neck had a hole. She had a bite to the side of her face and her ear was hanging off. Her jaw was also broken in two places, and the dogs had forced a tooth out of her mouth.

Rhianna required surgery for all of that and stitches, which has left considerable scarring. As Dr Evans said, the skin continues to grow, so those scars are stretching as she gets older and bigger. She will need further operations on the scar on her leg and she wants to have the one on her neck looked at, too. You can actually see the dots from the stitches on all of her scars. Because she was such a skinny little thing at the time and she still is, her skin is stretching and the scars are more visible now.

Rhianna had another operation on her jaw around four years ago. She now has two metal plates and one of them was causing her a lot of discomfort in one side of her jaw, so it had to be filed down to ease the discomfort. The doctors have told her that, if she has any more discomfort and they have to do anything else, she will probably suffer nerve damage to the bottom of her face and she might even lose all of her bottom teeth.

Rhianna suffers from anxiety quite a lot. Basically, she turned into a recluse after the dog attack. Before it, she was always out in the street playing and constantly out on her bike. After, she did not leave the house a lot and, when she did, she was very anxious. It is only in the last six months or so that she has been coming out of her shell again, and that is because she has started a college course in acting and performance and they are dragging it out of her. Otherwise, I think that she would have continued to be very introverted and quiet. She holds a lot inside and keeps a lot to herself.

About a year after it happened, she had one visit to a psychologist, and they said, "Oh, she's doing very well—we have never seen anyone cope so well," but they did not follow it up and nothing else happened. She is still suffering now, physically and mentally, and there will be more operations in future.

Natalie Crawford: I want to draw on two points that Lisa Grady and Claire Booth raised. The first is about the emotional impact that such attacks have. I have interviewed many families who are in similar situations, and the first thing that they tell me is that the emotional impact lasts long after the wounds have been patched up and the stitches have been taken out—it is the longest-lasting impact.

The second point is on the confusion about who is responsible for controlling dogs. The police seem to think that it is the local authorities and the local authorities seem to think that it is the police. That is a common theme throughout all the cases that I have dealt with in the course of the lead the way campaign.

The Convener: Dr Corfield, you are from the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, so you represent all the doctors in accident and emergency departments up and down the country who receive and treat people who have been attacked by dogs. What is your perspective?

09:30

Dr Corfield: It would be difficult for me to add anything on the physical and psychological effects on patients. The three stories that we heard this morning accurately describe the impact of dog bites. My reflection is that that happens probably 5,000 times a year in Scotland, so there are about 5,000 individual stories every year like those that we heard this morning. They might not be of the same severity, but they are all significant.

I am pretty sure, although it is difficult to get figures on this, that there are a number of people who never come to an emergency department following a dog bite, particularly for bites of lower acuity, which makes me wonder about the one free bite rule. How do you judge when a bite is a bite? Is it a bite that requires medical attention or is it any bite?

From the emergency medicine point of view, dog bites cause a part of our workload, although perhaps compared with some major health problems, they are not a major part. However, every time that it happens, it is a significant event, because it is not a pleasant thing to deal with or treat, particularly when children are involved. As with many of the problems that attend our emergency departments, it is a public health issue and requires a co-ordinated approach.

The Convener: Do you have any idea about what that approach should be?

Dr Corfield: Public health is an interest of mine, but it is not my area of expertise. As with many of the other problems that attend our emergency departments, dealing with the issue requires

joined-up thinking between social, justice and health services, and the police.

The Convener: You said that it was particularly distressing when children were involved and that about 5,000 incidents of dog bite attacks go through emergency departments every year. What proportion of the 5,000 incidents involve children?

Dr Corfield: I do not have those figures, but, based on the figures that were presented to the committee, about 20 per cent of dog bite attacks are on children.

The Convener: Sorry—I did not catch that.

Dr Corfield: Based on the figures that Natalie Crawford presented, which come from my health board, NHS Ayrshire and Arran, about 20 per cent of the dog bite incidents involve children. If you were to extrapolate that, which I have not done, you would get an estimate of about 1,000 incidents a year in Scotland.

Dr Evans: Children are generally smaller than adults and their faces are nearer to the ground, so the percentage of children who get injured makes the situation seem less important than it really is, because facial injuries are so difficult to hide. A greater percentage of dog bite injuries are facial injuries if someone is not, say, 6ft tall; taller people are more likely to have a hand or leg injury, although I do not want to minimise those injuries.

Alex Neil: I want to ask the two doctors whether they see any patterns. In the horrific stories that we heard this morning, it happened that Rottweilers were the culprits in each case. As we know, the original legislation dealt with the breed rather than the deed. It could be any breed of dog, and small dogs as well as big dogs.

With the people who present to A and E or for plastic surgery, have you discerned any patterns with regard to, for example, the type of dog that attacked, the circumstances in which the dog attacked or the circumstances of the dog owner?

Dr Evans: No, absolutely not. Quite a lot of small dogs are confined, get frustrated and then attack. It is definitely not only the big dogs.

Dr Corfield: I agree completely. There are lots of different circumstances in which dog attacks occur. It is not just down to the breed.

Alex Neil: Do attacks generally happen out in public places or do they also take place in the home? Are there family dogs that attack members of the family? This morning, all the stories were about people who were outside and attacked by dogs that they did not know.

Dr Corfield: I do not have figures to back this up, but my experience is that it is fairly evenly split between attacks in domestic family circumstances and in public places.

Alex Neil: It could happen any time and anywhere to anybody, basically.

Lisa Grady: Alex Neil asked whether dogs attack in the home or out and about. The dogs that attacked my daughter had escaped from an enclosed garden and the owner was not even aware that they were out. One of the dogs—or maybe both of them—had a control order against it already, so it had already had its one free bite.

Claire Booth: I do not agree with deed not breed—I think that the issue is the breed of dogs. The dogs that have been mentioned were Rottweilers and, in my case, an English bull terrier. What you see in the press tends to be the muscular, powerful dogs that are capable of locking their jaws, and their jaws are very powerful. You do not tend to hear about a Labrador, a collie or a small, Maltese-type dog. These dogs are big and powerful and should not be in small homes—a lot of people have them in little flats and do not have the facilities to care for them. These breeds need to have a ban on them. People should not be able to get these breeds in the way that they can.

Natalie Crawford: Dr Corfield talked about the number of people who attend accident and emergency departments with dog bite injuries. In 2018, in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, NHS Ayrshire and Arran and NHS Lanarkshire—Radio Clyde's broadcast area—it was nine people a day, at least one of whom was a child.

Veronica Lynch: Last winter, in the course of his work as an estate agent, our younger son went into a flat where there was a Rottweiler, which immediately attacked him. Fortunately, he had a really thick jacket on, so there was only one tiny puncture wound, but his arm was black and blue—it was really quite bad. Because of what had happened to his sister, he refused point blank to report the attack—he could not face going through any more trauma. His is another attack that was not reported, simply because of the psychological damage that he had suffered in losing his sister. I believe that a lot of attacks go unreported. People are just too frightened of the repercussions.

The Convener: Like Claire Booth was saying, that is another Rottweiler—a big, muscular dog kept in a small, confined space.

Veronica Lynch: In a way, I believe that the issue is the deed, but the breed does matter. While a wee Yorkshire terrier can inflict painful damage, it is unlikely to rip the throat out of any child, because by the time it got near to doing that, it would have been stopped. Dogs like that are manageable. Big dogs are too powerful, and when their jaws lock, you cannot remove them.

Colin Beattie: I would be interested in hearing the panel's views on a couple of recurring themes.

One that I have come across in my constituency is the confusion about the roles and responsibilities of the local council and the police. Do you think that the public is sufficiently knowledgeable about where to report such incidents?

Veronica Lynch: There is some confusion. Last year, a wee boy in Dundee was attacked by a Rottweiler and suffered horrendous injuries. The police were called and said that no crime had occurred, so there were no charges. There was a public outcry, though, and after telling the parents to call the council, the police went back and charged the owner of the dog. The dog was taken away and put into a police pound or something, and then the owner died, so there were no more proceedings. The dog was brought back to the house and, because the wee boy lives in the same street, his life is pretty difficult, having to see that dog every day.

The Convener: So there was real confusion about the powers of the police and who should be in charge.

Veronica Lynch: Huge confusion.

Natalie Crawford: In a lot of these cases, I have found that when people report incidents to the police they are often referred back to the local authority, because of the 2010 act. However, as I said, for the past three years areas such as Glasgow have not had any dog control wardens who have been trained to deal with the legislation. If there is no one to implement the legislation, who can people turn to?

Dr Corfield: If we are talking about the number of injuries, I would just like to clarify a previous answer. I suppose that my point was that any dog of any breed can inflict an injury, and that is the pattern that we have seen. However, from what I have seen—and I am speaking from personal experience now—I would agree that the more significant injuries come from bigger, more muscular dogs.

Liam Kerr: I have a couple of questions, the first of which is for the two medical professionals and arises from something that Lisa Grady said. Is there any guidance in place to deal with someone who presents at A and E or to their general practitioner with such injuries? Is there an obligation on the NHS to get in touch with the police and say, "This is what has happened—you need to do something", or is it completely in a silo of treating the injury and leaving the matter there?

Dr Corfield: We are not obliged to report anything to the police unless there has been a threat to life or it is a public order issue. We would approach the matter as we would approach any assault. If there is serious injury, we would report it to the police, but in the majority of cases, we would not contact the police.

Liam Kerr: So you are not obliged to contact the police. I appreciate that I am asking for your personal view now, Dr Corfield, but do you think that there should be such an obligation? I am very much persuaded that there should be, because I have seen attacks that have not been reported. Surely the NHS ought to have a duty to report such matters to the police. Do you agree?

Dr Corfield: There are some issues in that respect. As I have said, we would approach the matter in the same way that we would approach interpersonal violence. The public benefit has to outweigh the risk of breaching patient confidentiality. I understand your point, but there are certain ethical issues that we would have to think about before we could do that as a matter of routine. Moreover, as we have heard from other members and witnesses, we need to be clear that the police are actually responsible for dealing with the issue. Again, my personal experience is that, unless it is a serious life-threatening matter or a public order issue, the police will not necessarily see it as their role to respond.

Dr Evans: Our primary responsibility is patient confidentiality. I have numerous experiences of the relatives of the child in question not wanting the police to get involved, because the incident involved the family dog. We cannot go against their wishes.

Liam Kerr: I understand. Just before I move on to another question, does anyone else have a view on whether the NHS should have a duty to report to the police?

Claire Booth: If the dog is not a family dog—and, in our case, the dogs were not ours—the police should be involved. Indeed, they were involved in our case. If there is an attack by a dog and it is clear when the person gets to hospital that what happened was not caused by the family dog or that they did not know the dog involved, the attack should be reported to the police, if it has not been reported already.

Liam Kerr: I want to take a slightly different tack with a question for Natalie Crawford that goes back to previous comments about the breed of dog. Is there not evidence that certain breeds are predisposed to certain behaviours? Indeed, was that not the impetus behind the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991? If so, does that not give credence to the argument that certain breeds should be singled out for restriction?

09:45

Natalie Crawford: As you alluded to, that was the focus of the 1991 act. My concern is with the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010, which—as Mr Neil said—has a focus on deed not breed.

The real issue is that the 2010 act is not being enforced properly by local authorities—either they are not aware of their responsibilities or they are not taking them seriously enough. That is where the focus needs to be, before we start looking at the 1991 act.

Liam Kerr: If there is evidence that certain breeds of dog are predisposed to such behaviour, does there not come a point at which we say, “These breeds of dog are not pets and should not be permitted to be kept as pets,” rather than having them as pets and then seeking to control them? I just put that out there as a possibility.

Natalie Crawford: I cannot speak to that, because that is not within the realm of my expertise. However, I can say that of the nine or 10 different families I have spoken to over the course of the campaign, the dogs at the centre of the cases have been big, powerful breeds.

Anas Sarwar: I have been struck by all the personal stories. As a parent of three young children, I cannot help but imagine that happening to my own child. Just this past weekend, I was with my three children in a local play park, which is protected by a gate and fencing around it. However, there was a large dog there that was clearly not under the control of the dog owner—it was probably bigger and stronger than the owner was. The dog came into the play park and clearly frightened the children. It knocked one child over and really traumatised another child—not one of my children—by running towards them. I have no doubt that there will be an impact on that child even though there was no bite or injury and that that child will feel traumatised for years and years to come when they go back to the play park.

I am struck by what Claire Booth said about people being able to go on to Gumtree or Facebook and acquire a dog. The reality is that the state deems that some people are not fit to be parents and their children are taken away from them, but where is the control around whether someone is fit to be a dog owner?

There has been a lot of focus this morning—understandably—on the breed of dog and the dog itself but less on the competence of the individual who is in charge or in control of that pet. Clearly, there are people who should not be anywhere near children and there are people who should not be anywhere near any kind of pet, including dogs. Do the witnesses agree with that view?

There is no way that the lady who was in charge of that dog at the weekend could control it. The dog was not on a lead, although it should have been, but even if it had been on a lead, in no way would she have been able to control it—it would have dragged her around the park. Do we need to

look at whether people are competent to be dog owners?

Lisa Grady: The two people who had the dogs that attacked my daughter had five kids of their own, but they were breeding dogs and selling them. The dogs were kept in sheds in back gardens—we heard several stories from neighbours.

After the attack, the dogs were destroyed and the case went to trial. The case against the woman, Sarah Kerr, was not proven and the man, Derek Adam, was found guilty and sentenced to 12 months. At the trial, under oath, Sarah Kerr said that she could not control the dogs and she did not know why her partner kept leaving her in charge of them. She said on the stand that the dogs would pull her off her feet.

After the trial was finished, it only took about two weeks for her to get another Rottweiler, which was sat at the window constantly—you could see it every time you drove past. We phoned the police, who went to visit her, and she ended up surrendering the dog. However, she did that voluntarily—the police could not take it from her because the case against her was not proven. She was not under a control order or anything; there was no ban—nothing. She could have continued to be an owner even though she basically admitted that she could not control the dogs. They could pull her off her feet if they wanted to, and yet she got another one after everything that had happened. She was obviously not a responsible owner for that type of breed.

Anas Sarwar: Do you think that there should be a licensing and registration system for breeders and dog owners? Should banning orders and control orders be used much more robustly?

Lisa Grady: Yes—definitely for the larger breeds. If there is not going to be a total ban on these dogs, something has to be done to make their owners take responsibility. There have to be harsher penalties, because I do not think that control orders are effective at all: these dogs were already under control orders, but their owners breached them. They were the type of people who would have breached them regardless—they would not have paid them any attention. We do not even know whether they were being monitored after the first control order was issued. If they were monitored, who was monitoring them? If the dogs were seen to be out of control, who did people such as neighbours report that to—the warden or the police? If a licence was required for these types of dog, if not all dogs, it would make people a bit more responsible. I also think that the owners need to be looked at, because in a lot of cases dogs are used as a status symbol.

Claire Booth: I totally agree with everything that has been said: stricter controls are needed. My concern is about who will fund them and where the staffing will come from. Everything across local government and councils is being cut right now, so how will it all be funded?

Veronica Lynch: None of the things that have been spoken about can stop dog attacks. A licence might help to fund more dog wardens and all the rest of it, but it will not stop attacks. The way to stop attacks is to require all dogs to be on a lead in public places, so that we can see at a glance if the law is being broken. For the larger breeds, which can inflict much more damage because of their size and power, I would advocate muzzles, but I think that all dogs should be on a lead in public at all times.

The Convener: Your evidence illustrates the principle that good law is clear law. If the law is clear, people know the situation: they know that certain breeds need to be muzzled or put on a lead, and that they are not allowed in children's play areas, as is the case in some council areas. From what we have heard this morning, it seems that there is a real lack of clarity about the law right across the country. Even the people in charge of enforcing the law—the police and the councils—do not know their own powers.

Bill Bowman: Claire Booth spoke about a dog owner who was given a control order, but moved away. Do you think that people lost sight of them after that?

Claire Booth: Yes. The dog wardens did not know where the owner stayed and they could not trace him, so they could not do the six-month review to ensure that he had taken the dog to training classes and was following everything up.

Bill Bowman: Do you think that the issue was that he moved away from your district, rather than to the next street or something?

Claire Booth: He moved out of the area when it was in the papers. We found out by chance: one of his neighbours was my son's football coach, who did not realise that Ryan had been attacked by his neighbour's dogs. He told us that his neighbour had moved away, but also that he had terrorised the entire street with his dogs, intentionally frightening people. Once it hit the newspapers that the man had been charged and that his dogs were involved in an attack, he moved away.

Bill Bowman: Is that something that has come out in Natalie Crawford's campaign?

Natalie Crawford: The problem is that dog control notices are issued by the local authority, but if somebody moves outwith the local authority area, there is no central system and no process

for passing on the notice to the new area. In fact, there is no way for a dog control warden even to know that a person subject to such an order has moved.

Bill Bowman: Have you asked the local authority who in its area is subject to a dog control order?

Natalie Crawford: Radio Clyde's broadcast area is Glasgow, where no dog control notices have been issued in the past three years.

Claire Booth: When we went to court and had a meeting with the procurator fiscal, the law requiring all dogs to be microchipped had come into force in Scotland. I asked whether the control order would be put on the microchip so that if anything happened the chip could be scanned to see that. The fiscal did not know the answer, but it turns out that that does not happen.

Bill Bowman: On a slightly different matter, you have spoken about the psychological effects on your family and the people involved. Were you offered support with that or did you have to seek it? How did support come about?

Claire Booth: When I was in hospital with Ryan, I demanded that he be referred to a child psychologist because I knew that it could have a long-term effect on him. We were referred to the psychologist, but only because Ryan had trouble sleeping at night. It was similar to what happened with Lisa Grady's daughter: there was one visit, the psychologist said that there were no issues, that Ryan was doing very well at school, enjoying playing in his football team and attending cubs—which are both in controlled areas—and that he should just continue with that.

We had to seek that support. The only support that was offered was through the hospital staff who directed us to a charity called Changing Faces that helps people with disfigurements. We were given a lot of support on how Ryan looks now, because he suffers from people looking at him—very unwanted staring—and he has been called names as a result of how he looks.

Willie Coffey: What we are hearing this morning is pretty harrowing. I find it difficult to begin to understand the pain that families have been through. Changing the legislation will clearly help us to enforce it and punish people, but I think that it was Veronica Lynch who said that that will not stop attacks occurring, and it probably would not have prevented these three attacks.

I want to explore the preventative measures that might begin to influence the problem and bring down the number of attacks. Claire Booth spoke about banning certain breeds and Veronica Lynch spoke about compulsory muzzling, restricting lead lengths and so forth. Are there any more ideas

that colleagues could share with us that might help to reduce the number of such attacks? We should not rely totally on legislation to solve the problem because it will not.

Claire Booth: Are you asking for my suggestions?

Willie Coffey: Yes, please.

Claire Booth: The big thing for me is for all dogs in public places to be on leads; we should make that the law, so that people cannot have a dog running about or being outside unless it is on a lead. Also, I feel that the control orders are a waste of time and do not work because there is no one to enforce them. That approach has not worked for me and it probably has not worked for anyone else.

Another big thing is to have stricter controls on people getting a dog. Not long ago, my sister looked into getting a house cat. She approached Cats Protection, which vetted her and said that she could not have a cat because she lives in a flat. Why does that not happen for dogs?

We need to stop all the breeding. We need a system in which recognised breeders with stricter controls on them are the only people that someone can get a dog from. They will have been through checks, they will know how to deal with dogs and they will be dog behaviour specialists. They can also deem whether someone is a fit person to have a dog and look at their surroundings to see whether those are suitable. Do they have children? Is there a back garden? Do they live in a small flat?

Those are the things that I think should change. I do not know whether they can be enforced. I know that it would be difficult, but we need to start at the root of the problem, which is people breeding dogs and giving them out to anyone who wants one, and people not understanding how to control dogs.

Willie Coffey: Do Lisa Grady and Veronica Lynch have any other ideas to offer?

Lisa Grady: I agree with Claire Booth about the breeders. The couple who owned the dogs that attacked Rhianna were breeding those dogs for a considerable amount of time and people in the area were buying them for pennies, from what I understand. At one point they were practically giving the dogs away for free because they could not find a vet to dock the tails and people did not want to pay for them. I agree that something needs to be done about breeders to try to control them in some way, but I have no suggestions about how to do that.

10:00

Veronica Lynch: I agree with everything that has been said. We have to start somewhere, and soon, to try to stop these attacks happening. Some breeders are unscrupulous. They really have to be vetted a bit more. However, from today, I would like to see something more proactive than reactive. We have been working with a reactive method for a long time and, 30 years on from Kellie's death, we are still getting the same headlines. Nothing has changed. Something has to be done. It is okay to sit around talking about it, but we really need to see some action.

The Convener: That call for action is a good note to wind up on. I think that Alex Neil is keen to summarise.

Alex Neil: I just have a quick question. Do we need to toughen up the punishment of the owners or—given that it is not always the owner who takes a dog into a public place—whoever is in charge of the dog? It seems to me that the sentences for the more extreme attacks are very light and need to be substantially strengthened. Having tougher sentences could have an impact on prevention, with the hope being that we would not need to use the tougher sentences, because folk would have learned their lesson. Might tougher sentences be part of the solution?

Claire Booth: I agree with that, but, again, Scottish prisons are bursting at the seams right now. Who will go to jail: someone who has murdered someone or someone who is the owner of a dog? We need to look at the bigger picture, but I agree that there should be tougher sentences. I think that the best sort of sentence would be a very hefty fine. Having to pay such an amount might make the person think again.

The Convener: I would like a much stricter preventative regime. The committee has undertaken to do some work on that. The evidence that we have heard this morning will help in that regard. I know that it has not been easy to give us that evidence, but I thank all the witnesses for coming this morning and for sharing their stories with such patience and fortitude. We appreciate it. They are welcome to stay and listen to the evidence of our next panel of witnesses.

I briefly suspend the meeting to allow a changeover of witnesses.

10:02

Meeting suspended.

10:10

On resuming—

The Convener: We are still on item 2, which is post-legislative scrutiny of the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010. We will now take evidence from our second panel. I believe that all the witnesses were in the public gallery during the evidence from the first panel, so I do not need to run through how the session will work. Instead of MSPs introducing themselves, I ask the witnesses to introduce themselves, starting with Gemma Cooper.

Gemma Cooper (NFU Scotland): I am the head of the policy team for NFU Scotland.

Melissa Donald (British Veterinary Association Scottish Branch): I am the Scottish branch president of the British Veterinary Association.

Mike Flynn (Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals): I am the chief superintendent of the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Dave Joyce (Communication Workers Union): I am the national health and safety officer for the Communication Workers Union.

Alison Robertson (National Dog Warden Association (Scotland)): I am a dog warden in Aberdeenshire, and I am representing the National Dog Warden Association (Scotland).

The Convener: Thank you very much. Would anyone like to make some introductory remarks?

Mike Flynn: We welcomed the bill when Alex Neil introduced it, in 2009, because it was meant to focus on prevention. We have dealt with the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, which is a stupid and ineffectual piece of legislation. We cannot blame the breed of a dog—if we want to add to the list, we should look at some of the dogs that are coming in now, such as American bulldogs, presa canario and cane corso dogs, which make Rottweilers look timid.

Part of the problem is that, after nearly every attack that has taken place before or since the 2010 act was introduced, someone has come out of the woodwork and said to the press that they could have told us that that would happen. People know that, in nine out of 10 cases, somebody cannot control their dog. The SSPCA exists to protect the welfare of animals, but none of our employees or inspectors will stick up for an irresponsible dog owner. If we cannot protect the public, we will never be able to protect pets.

Had the 2010 act been implemented properly, some of the problems that the committee has heard about today would not have happened. Claire Booth talked about a dog disappearing to a

different area, but, if the database had existed, the dog would have been traceable. It is an offence under the 2010 act for somebody not to notify the authorities that they are moving address; however, without that database, nobody will ever know, and the penalties are very small.

Alison Robertson is one of the most knowledgeable dog wardens in the country. The biggest problem is that people like her are as rare as hen's teeth. The committee heard Natalie Crawford, from Radio Clyde, say that one warden is covering the whole of Glasgow. There can be as many wardens as we like but, if they do not know about dogs' behaviour and how dog owners should behave, the system will not be successful. We cannot put the role on the end of someone else's job title.

Alison Robertson: When it was bringing in the 2010 act, the Scottish Government, to its credit, consulted quite widely with the National Dog Warden Association (Scotland), as the national body. The Government discussed with us what was needed, and it listened to us to a fair extent. However, the act was sold to local authorities and dog wardens as basically introducing antisocial behaviour orders for dogs. It was aimed at dealing with dogs that are out of control, before they get to the point of carrying out anything as serious as the attacks that we have been discussing.

We tend to deal more with dog-on-dog attacks than with attacks on people. The fact that the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 is a piece of civil legislation means that dog control notices are civil notices. If we issue a dog control notice because of an act that the dog has carried out, that is the end of the matter. As long as the owner of the dog complies with the notice, there will be no other repercussions for them. In the case of a more serious attack, however, the owner will have to go to court, where the matter will be dealt with as a criminal act.

10:15

The failure to set up a database was a big miss. We cannot speak to another local authority unless we know where the dog owner has gone. If I issue a dog control notice in Aberdeenshire, it will be effective only within the boundary of Aberdeenshire. If the owner moved into Aberdeen city—we cross the boundary all the time—the notice would not be effective there. We would have to tell the Aberdeen City Council dog warden about the notice, and they could issue a notice for Aberdeen city if that was where the dog spent half its time. It would be helpful if the notices were effective throughout Scotland or, indeed, Britain. That would help with control, because it would mean that, even if the owner moved and did not notify us, the notice would still be in effect.

Breaching a notice is a criminal offence for which the owner can be reported.

Dave Joyce: The Communication Workers Union is the largest trade union in the communications industry. We represent 200,000 workers across the UK, 9,000 of whom are employed by Royal Mail and Parcelforce in Scotland. We have 95,000 postmen and postwomen on the streets of the UK six days a week, 52 weeks of the year. Therefore, we are on the front line when it comes to being confronted by irresponsible owners with out-of-control dogs. Unfortunately, because we represent so many people and see so many devastating attacks, we are the number 1 stakeholder in relation to dog control problems.

Every year, 250 postmen and postwomen in Scotland and 3,000 postmen and postwomen across the UK are attacked by dogs. Some of those attacks are so serious, physically and mentally, that the victim cannot continue in their job as a postman or postwoman. As a result, we struggle with the issue on a daily basis.

All members will have received my booklet "Dog Attacks on Postal Workers". Last year, you would have received three letters and two briefing documents before the excellent debate on this very important issue that took place in the chamber on 8 May. More recently, you would have received information on two recent dog attacks on postal workers in Scotland, so you will know about the devastating injuries that two of our members—Lynn Fergusson in the Lothians and John Diggle in Dumfries—recently sustained. Their injuries are life changing: they will be disabled for the rest of their lives. They have been badly scarred, and Lynn's face is particularly badly affected. We are not sure—particularly in John's case—whether they will be able to continue to do their everyday jobs as postal workers.

We have a serious problem in relation to dog control legislation and the lack of enforcement in Scotland. The misinterpretation of dog control law is a root cause of what is a major crisis. Dog control and dog attacks are out of control across the country. It is no good dodging the issue; misinterpretation of the law is certainly a root cause of the crisis in Scotland. The fact that there has been an 80 per cent increase in the number of dog attacks in the past decade is a result of that.

The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 are not working for us. They are not delivering results—they are not protecting postal workers. Incredibly, although the legislation does not require it, those who enforce it in Scotland currently require proof that the person in charge of the dog believed that the dog would attack someone. Secondly, there must be corroborated evidence of a previous bite or attack,

or of the existence of a bad temperament. We have spoken on many occasions about the one free bite rule that is applied in Scotland, and the issue came up again earlier in the meeting. That is not reflected in any legislation, legal guidance or sentencing advice that is applied by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service or the police. As a result, many victims of very serious dog attacks, with very serious injuries, do not get justice for the offences that are committed against them by the owners of the dogs. That is extremely serious. Police Scotland's submission details that quite graphically.

The committee and, indeed, the Government should be extremely concerned about the situation and what the police are saying. Police Scotland undertook a survey of its 13 policing divisions, and several of them reported total confusion among their officers regarding the correct legislation to use when dealing with dangerous dogs. That says that police officers do not understand the law that they are expected to enforce. Police Scotland says that there are

"a number of examples where Dog Control Notices had been breached but COPFS declined to pursue"

those cases any further. Even when dog control notices are served, they are not being enforced.

Police Scotland goes on to describe a meeting between the police, the COPFS and the local authority

"whereby the outcome of the meeting for overall service delivery and public protection provision was not as robust as police would have preferred. The PF explained they could not prosecute a one off dog bite".

Let us think about what the COPFS is saying: it will not prosecute one-off dog bites, which it says should be dealt with through dog control notices although we all know that dog control notices were introduced as a preventative measure. We have this ping-pong situation going on between the police, the COPFS and local authorities about who should enforce the law.

I will finish on a number of points. First, in their own words, the police and the COPFS do not understand the law. Secondly, the COPFS declines to deal with DCN breaches and will not prosecute owners for one-off dog bites—that is the one free bite rule. It also states that most cases should be dealt with through a dog control notice, but we know that they should not.

I will leave it at that, but I want to come back in with other information later.

The Convener: We know that your workers are at the front line of this every day, so it is good to have your evidence.

Melissa Donald: We strongly support a deed not breed approach to irresponsible dog

ownership, and we support the 2010 act's current provision for local authorities to impose measures, through dog control notices, on a person in charge of a dog who fails to keep the dog under control. At the end of the day, it is not the dog's fault but the fault of the human in charge of the dog. However, we are concerned that, due to a lack of resources, that provision has not been effectively enforced, so we have yet to see the 2010 act achieve its intended aim of promoting responsible dog ownership, reducing dog attacks and increasing public safety.

Fundamentally, we need a holistic approach. As was said earlier, the prisons are already full and the courts are busy, so, instead of using the stick approach, let us try to prevent dog attacks. Local authorities need to be adequately resourced, through ring-fenced funding, to take consistent measures and ensure that people are trained to the right level. Through the DCNs, we need to be able to tackle irresponsible ownership before it becomes a problem. We need to list the signs of aggression and what is acceptable behaviour.

We would also like to improve awareness of the 2010 act and to reinforce to all owners that they have a legal responsibility to ensure that, regardless of the breed or where they live, their dog does not become dangerously out of control. We would do that by promoting education about responsible dog ownership and how to achieve safe interactions between owners, family members and the public. The Scottish Government has recently done some brilliant work with the buy a puppy safely campaign.

We need to inform responsible ownership and dog bite prevention programmes with evidence generated from further investigation into dog bite incidence. That all fits in very well with the work that Emma Harper MSP is already doing. To me, it is all about prevention, not blaming the dog and ensuring that owners know what they need to know.

The Convener: Thank you very much. It is interesting that you mention Emma Harper, as the consultation on the proposed protection of livestock (Scotland) bill—her proposed member's bill about dog attacks on livestock—was launched this morning.

So far, we have heard predominantly about attacks on humans, especially children, but we also have here Gemma Cooper from NFU Scotland, whose concern is attacks on livestock—is that right?

Gemma Cooper: Yes, it is. We are pleased to see the launch of the consultation on Emma Harper's proposed bill today, because we think it will go some way towards addressing the issues that we will outline.

I echo what Mike Flynn said. We definitely welcome the spirit of the 2010 act, but, over the past two years, we have seen a 67 per cent increase in the number of attacks on livestock. The cost to the farming industry is vast, and it is a Scotland-wide issue, although it happens more in certain areas.

One of the major issues is dog owners' lack of understanding of what is acceptable. The other relevant piece of legislation is the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, which established the Scottish outdoor access code. As was said earlier, the issue is clarity. The code directs the public to keep their dogs

“on a ... lead or under close control”

around livestock—it gives them a choice. That is not clear enough, so we are lobbying for clearer guidance that, if a dog is in a field, particularly around sheep, it must be on a lead.

The dog control notices are a useful interim step because they require only a civil standard of proof, but we have found that they are not widely used by local authorities. The level of understanding seems to vary among dog wardens and police officers. According to figures that we obtained via a freedom of information request, 26 DCNs were issued in Scotland for livestock worrying in the six months from 1 December 2017 to 31 May 2018, 12 of which were issued in Argyll and Bute, which suggests that the dog warden there is pretty active. Of the 32 local authorities, 21 issued no DCNs for livestock worrying. I know that some of those authorities are in city areas, but they cannot all be.

There also seems to be a disconnect between the police and local dog wardens. In some cases, when we have been made aware of livestock worrying and have approached the local dog warden, they have said, “We know that the police are involved, so we're not touching it.” I do not understand why they take that approach—Alison Robertson may know more about that.

I echo the comments that have been made about the database, which we discuss in our submission. People who allow their dogs to worry livestock are quite often people who do not have a fixed abode. There was recently a really horrific case of livestock worrying in Argyll, for example, where the guy was living in a forest with about 10 huskies. That was quite an extreme case, but he was very difficult to trace: he subsequently moved and there was no way of tracing him or having that continuity. That was definitely a source of frustration at the time.

I do not know enough about microchipping technology, as I am not an expert in such things, but linking a DCN to microchip information could

be quite useful, because—I assume—it could follow a dog throughout its life.

The maximum sanction for breaching a DCN is a £1,000 fine. Claire Booth said that the fines should be much higher, but our view is that the people who allow their dogs to worry livestock do not have the money to pay the fines anyway. The 2010 act seems to make provision only for fines, not for anything like community payback orders. The sanctions need to reflect the social issues so that it is not possible for people to wriggle out of them. When we talk about sanctions, we must bear in mind that these guys do not care if their dog is removed—they will just go and get another one, because it is easy to do so. Imposing heftier fines would send a clear message, but we must ensure that other sanctions are also in place.

The Convener: We heard a lot from the first panel about deed and breed. Do you have evidence about all the attacks? You mentioned a 67 per cent increase in attacks—was that over the past year?

Gemma Cooper: That was over the past two years.

The Convener: That is a huge increase. I have two questions. What is the explanation for that? Is it specific breeds or all dogs that are doing the attacks?

10:30

Gemma Cooper: We have no evidence to suggest that there is a problem with specific breeds. Part of the reason for such a big increase has probably been that we have been encouraging people to report incidents—we must take some credit for that. When we recently surveyed our members, about 50 per cent of the respondents said that they would not report livestock worrying. Some of them feel that, if they report it, the police will not bother to attend.

Aside from the increased reporting, there are lots of moves afoot to encourage the public to access the outdoors, which links into the Scottish Government's targets to reduce obesity and so on. There has been an increase in people accessing the outdoors and a vast proportion of them—I do not remember the exact figure—have dogs with them.

As I said, we have no evidence to suggest that there is a problem with specific breeds. Our members have encountered issues with breeds such as huskies and akitas, but terriers and other small dogs are also often mentioned. Melissa Donald referred to dog behaviour, and we have definitely found that the issue is behavioural. When a dog has worried livestock once, it is more

likely to do so again, because it has a taste for that.

Alison Robertson: We would serve a dog control notice for the worrying of livestock if the police requested that we do so, as long as the owner was being reported to court for it, because the owner has been irresponsible. In-year figures were not issued for Aberdeenshire last year, but we have issued notices in the past, and that has always been our approach.

I am interested to know whether the NFUS has figures on how many of the incidents that have been reported as part of the increase have involved multiple dogs.

Gemma Cooper: We do not have figures for that.

Alison Robertson: I ask that because a good number of the dog-on-dog attacks that we deal with involve dogs from multiple-dog households. A link seems to exist. There has been a shift in how dogs are perceived in society and how families perceive them. Families get one dog to keep the other dog company, but that can lead to a loss of control over the dogs, because they become a unit—I would not call them a pack, because that is not what I mean, but they look to each other and they tend to run off together and so on.

Gemma Cooper: Anecdotally, I would say that our members are saying that it is usually multiple dogs that are involved in the attacks. However, I do not have figures for that.

Melissa Donald: I will follow up on that. The big dogs do big damage, which makes the headlines, but we have to remember that, when small dogs go into a field to follow a rabbit and then have deaf ears, do not come back when they are called and end up chasing sheep around, we might not see the damage that has been done until much later, when the sheep abort their lambs, and that does not make headlines. That is why we focus on deed not breed. The big dogs make the headlines, but the little dogs do a lot of damage, too.

Dave Joyce: It is important to make clear the Communication Workers Union's position. We do not support breed-specific legislation. Although postal workers make up the majority of dog-attack victims across the United Kingdom, we believe that the breed-specific legislation debate is a diversion from the problems that we face. We are pro dog, but we are anti bad owners of dogs.

Postal workers are attacked by every breed and cross-breed—it does not matter what the breed is. It is a fact that we have to concentrate on the deed and not the breed. The longer the debate about breeds goes on, the more we are diverted from the huge problem of bad ownership and lack of control. The problem is firmly on the other end of

the lead—if a lead is there. You could have a Tyrannosaurus rex as a pet, if you wanted, as long as you kept it under control in your house in a manner that meant that it would not attack the postman or postwoman.

If someone is totally irresponsible and does not control their dog, does not treat it right and does not socialise it, it will not be a surprise if it takes every opportunity to attack the postman or postwoman. That is our firm belief. I wanted to get that out of the way.

The Convener: I open the discussion to members.

Bill Bowman: I have a couple of questions for Mike Flynn. If, after an incident, owners of particular breeds do not want to keep the dogs or feel that they cannot control them, do they pass the dogs to you for rehoming?

Mike Flynn: That is one of the problems that we have. If a bull terrier breed has been involved in an incident, there is normally a spike in the number of bull terriers that are abandoned or in the number of people who decide that they do not want them because of the devil dog tag. That happens.

As I have said, a lot of the problem is down to a lack of enforcement, but it is also about money when cases move from the 2010 act to the 1991 act. We are looking after a number of dogs for Police Scotland, but keeping them in kennels for a year before a case goes to court costs the police budget £5,000 a year per dog, as well as being bad for animal welfare. It is all down to finances. The police will do anything to be able to say that a dog does not need to be dealt with under the 1991 act but requires an order under the 2010 act. Further enforcement under the 2010 act would help, because it would get away from the idea that dangerous dogs are a problem only in public places. A lot of such incidents happen in people's homes and involve, for example, a granddaughter getting killed when the granny is looking after the pit bull for someone.

Mr Joyce talked about the number of his members who have been attacked in Scotland, and we should think about how many of those cases have led to a dog control notice. A lot of such cases are not reported, because people do not know where to report them, or they try to report them but get diverted somewhere else, so nothing happens.

Bill Bowman: We have heard about keeping dogs on leads. Would muzzling in public get rid of a lot of the issues?

Mike Flynn: Under the 1991 act, someone with a legal pit bull terrier that is on the exempted list must have it on a lead and muzzled at all times in public places, but not in the person's house.

Bill Bowman: Should that apply to all dogs?

Mike Flynn: That would present a welfare issue for some dogs. Some dogs cannot take to a muzzle, and it can change their temperament, because we are taking away their one defence mechanism. It is another tool that could be used, but Alison Robertson, Melissa Donald and anybody else who knows dogs and dog owners will tell you that the issue is whether a person can control their dog.

The maximum penalty under the 2010 act is £1,000, but that is it—there is no provision for a sheriff to ban someone from owning a dog for life if they are convicted under the act. If someone could not own a dog, they could not own an aggressive dog.

I would go even further. With Police Scotland, we have dealt with people who use dogs as weapons. I was really surprised by Dr Corfield's answer to Liam Kerr's question. If that doctor treats someone with a stab wound, he is legally obliged to report it. What is the difference between that and a kid getting ripped up by a dog? Doctors would not be breaking that person's confidentiality, because they would be saying that a crime has taken place, but it would be up to police to investigate it. There are dogs that have carried out attacks and have then been left alone, and they will attack again because the owners will not take responsibility.

Colin Beattie: The feedback that I heard from people in my constituency who have experienced dog control notices is that a notice is issued, but the neighbours are not allowed to know the terms of that notice. How can anyone police the system if no one knows what the terms are? We will never know whether the dog has breached the notice.

Alison Robertson: The confidentiality is in place because the Scottish Government advised us that, as the 2010 act is civil law and a dog control notice is a civil measure, data protection prevents us from saying that a notice is in place, because there has not been a criminal conviction. When a notice is put on a dog that says that it must be muzzled and on a lead, we cannot tell people about that, but we always tell them that, if they google the act, they will see that we have put in place everything that we can, and we say that, if they see anything to give them any concern at all, they should phone us. If someone says that they saw the dog out without a muzzle, we will deal with that and get a statement because, if we are given evidence that an owner has breached the notice, that becomes a criminal offence. We can then tell everybody about the notice, because the case has been reported to the court as a crime.

Colin Beattie: That does not seem very efficient.

Alison Robertson: It does not, and that is one reason why we are banging our heads against a brick wall on the issue. We cannot say to neighbours, "If you see that dog without a lead or a muzzle, phone us immediately." We could then go and witness that, and the owner could be reported for it.

Colin Beattie: Is there written guidance on that from the Scottish Government? The matter is not in the 2010 act.

Alison Robertson: It is not. When the act was introduced, we asked the question, which was put to the Scottish Government's legal department, and that was the answer that came back.

Colin Beattie: That is extraordinary.

The Convener: We had three community sessions on the 2010 act—one in Airdrie, one in Dalkeith and one in Dundee, which Bill Bowman and I attended and where the issue that Alison Robertson raises was highlighted as something that really frustrates people, and particularly owners whose dogs have been attacked by other dogs. Once an incident has been reported, a dog warden cannot tell—

Alison Robertson: That is a frustration for us, too, because it quite often results in complaints about our not doing our job. We cannot defend ourselves and say, "We've done everything that we can."

The Convener: From what you have said, I presume that you are looking for that requirement to—

Alison Robertson: To be removed.

The Convener: Do you want the committee to look into the issue in the course of its scrutiny?

Alison Robertson: Yes, please.

Liam Kerr: I have two questions, the second of which will be for Dave Joyce. I completely understand Melissa Donald's point about deed not breed, but do you have any sympathy with the view that some dogs are simply not suitable as pets and that, unless there is some special reason or dispensation, the average person should not own a certain breed of dog that is predisposed to violent behaviour?

Melissa Donald: All dogs can be violent—full stop—no matter whether it be a Yorkie terrier, an akita or a Great Dane. I have been nibbled at by dogs of different shapes and sizes. The difference is that small dogs can be picked up by the scruff, if people can get near enough. My answer to your question is therefore no—the issue should be the deed, every single time.

Liam Kerr: I pose the same question to Mike Flynn. I accept Melissa Donald's point that, if I

were nibbled at by a Jack Russell, I would be more likely to be able to do something about it than I could if I was attacked by a Rottweiler.

Mike Flynn: There are breeds that are more powerful but, as I said to Melissa Donald earlier, one of the worst injuries that I have seen was done by a Yorkshire terrier. It disfigured a six-month-old baby's face for life, with all the traumatic effects that that had.

As I said at the beginning, there would be a problem with adding Rottweilers to the list of dangerous dogs. Members should see some of the breeds that have come in since the banning of pit bulls; in fact, I could show you breeds at our kennels on Bothwell Road that you would not even have known existed in this country. The pit bull terrier is banned, although it can be exempted, but the 1991 act also banned the tosa, the fila brasileiro and the dogo argentino, none of which existed in this country before—there might have been one tosa in all that time. Pit bulls were targeted because they were involved in dog fighting and because of a couple of horrendous attacks down in England, but it was just a knee-jerk reaction. Half the breeds in the country could have been put on the list, simply because they are powerful.

It does not matter whether the dog is powerful—the question is whether it is in the right hands with a knowledgeable owner. Years ago, we had a big problem with Dalmatians. People would see "101 Dalmatians" and get one because they thought that the dogs looked lovely. However, they did not realise that the dogs are carriage dogs that need to have a 30 or 40-mile run every day to keep calm. They would lock up the dogs in the house, and the dogs became aggressive. A properly reared, trained and looked-after Rottweiler is no more dangerous to the public than a Labrador; in fact, if we looked at the national figures, we might find that Labradors inflict more bites than any other breed, because they are plentiful and many such incidents happen at home. However, there are serious cases that hit the front pages of the newspapers.

Melissa Donald: I have been bitten by more black Labradors than by any other dog, but the question is where we put the limit in today's world, now that every dog is a designer cross-breed.

Liam Kerr: That is interesting.

The Convener: In that case, what would you say to Veronica Lynch, whose daughter was killed by a Rottweiler? Surely such dogs have the physical capacity to kill or severely maim a child, whereas a smaller dog of a different breed does not.

Mike Flynn: I have been in this job for 32 years and I have known Mrs Lynch for 29 of them. I was

around when that incident happened and, to me, what the gentleman who owned those dogs did was criminal. He let two Rottweilers with a combined weight of 20 stones out with a five-stone child. That was a recipe for disaster. It is not as though it was some lifelong friend or the child had known the dogs—the family were on holiday. That was stupidity. Anyone with common sense would not have allowed that to happen.

10:45

The Convener: I have another question. You talk about responsible owners—how do we legislate for that?

Mike Flynn: Sadly, we have to wait until after the event. Someone who has been found guilty of such an offence should never be allowed to be in charge of or to touch a dog again in their life. We get people who have had dangerous dogs and been dealt with by the court who then go and get another dog.

The Convener: Is it good enough for public safety that we have to wait until after something happens? Should there be a more rigorous licensing scheme that judges whether someone is a fit and proper person to own such an animal?

Mike Flynn: That would be great in an ideal world. We scrapped the dog licensing scheme through the Post Office. Where would we stop? Would we move to responsible ownership? Claire Booth said that when her sister wanted a cat, her flat was inspected and she was told that it was not suitable.

If someone wants a powerful breed of dog from the SSPCA, they are examined in our centre, they are quizzed, their family has to come to the centre and we visit their home. We do all that to make sure that someone has all the proper stuff. One of the biggest complaints that we get at the SSPCA is people saying, "You are a charity and you want to get rid of dogs, but you refuse to home a dog with me." We will not home a dog with somebody who is unsuitable but, if I refuse somebody, they can go on the internet and get a dog delivered tomorrow.

The Convener: Would you support the reintroduction of a dog licensing scheme?

Mike Flynn: There has been a call for a competency test to check whether people know what they are doing. The SSPCA quizzes people about whether they know the breed that they are taking on, and the requirements of that breed. The dogs that have always been hardest to rehome are retired greyhounds.

The Convener: Can you give me a clear answer? Would you support the reintroduction of a dog licensing scheme?

Mike Flynn: Given that we cannot even fund the work that is being done, or the database that could have been set up—

The Convener: Do you think that reintroducing licensing is a good idea?

Mike Flynn: I do not think that the Government could afford it.

The Convener: But do you think that it is a good idea?

Mike Flynn: Yes.

The Convener: You think that reintroducing licensing would be a good idea.

Mike Flynn: I think that we should introduce a competency test or something that could be removed: for example, if a person's licence was taken from them, they would have to surrender their dog.

Melissa Donald: It should not be as straightforward as just going to a post office and paying 37½p for a dog licence. It should be something like the theory driving licence, in which there are hazard-awareness tests and so on. For example, the person would have to list the potential hazards in a park, showing that they understand what is involved. It is all about education, having compulsory insurance and so on.

The Convener: I will bring in Alison Robertson on this point, then move to Alex Neil.

Alison Robertson: I was more or less going to say what Melissa Donald just said. It should be compulsory for people to do more research before they get a dog, and to prove that they have done that research. A lot of people buy breeds based on how the dogs look; they do not look into the background of the breed.

Breeds have been honed by man to do certain jobs over hundreds, if not thousands, of years, so they have different traits and tendencies. If those traits and tendencies suit the person's lifestyle, that is great—get that breed of dog if you are able to train it and deal with it. However, people get big dogs and expect them to sit in a flat 9 to 5, or instead give them to a dog walker who walks them in a park, so they become dog oriented.

There really should be some kind of competency test. If people just have to pay a fee to get a dog, only the responsible owners will do that, and there will be penalties for the pensioner who has a wee dog to keep them company. However, people who are not law-abiding just now will not pay and will not chip their dogs, so we will never trace the dog to them.

Alex Neil: I very much endorse what Alison Robertson, Melissa Donald and Mike Flynn have

said. The plastic surgeon who was here earlier said to me privately on her way out that if we look at the NHS statistics, we see that the amount of resource that is employed in dealing with the effects of dog attacks is 10 times what it is for dealing with the implications of misuse of shotguns.

To own a shotgun, a person requires a licence. They have to keep it in a safe place and to meet other conditions; and there is regular police inspection to see whether the owner is adhering to that system. I think that Mike Flynn agrees in principle with the introduction of a system, similar to that for owning a shotgun, that is not just about paying money and being allowed to own the dog but involves some kind of competency test that would cover a wide range of things.

In an ideal world, we could ring fence the revenue from the licence fee and use it for enforcement of the law. We could solve the funding issue if we had a proper licence fee—with the licence being awarded on the basis of competency—and we ring fenced that money for councils, the police or whoever to enforce the law. We would then have a double benefit: there would be the benefit of having a licensing system along with production of a good chunk of the revenue that would be required to enforce the law. Would that suggestion have the support of people round the table?

Mike Flynn: That would make perfect sense. The system should be self-funding. In Sweden, a person needs a licence before they can get a dog: people do not get the dog and then apply. There is also some form of competency requirement attached to that.

If we cannot properly fund the enforcers—I mean local authorities rather than the police—enforcement will not happen. Enforcement could be funded through a licence scheme. People might have to pay £500 for their original licence, but some people pay £3,500 for a pup—not to the SSPCA, but to breeders—so it is not as if money is the big barrier.

Melissa Donald: The BVA would support the suggestion, but for a licence per dog, not per person.

Dave Joyce: I will quickly comment on a couple of points that have been debated.

Dogs can be muzzled via a dog control notice or an ancillary order that is handed down by the courts. However, I would prefer the courts to use banning of ownership and keepership, rather than muzzling, because muzzling is not a solution, in my view.

One of the results of breed-specific legislation has been that when animals have been added to

the banned list, some people just search for alternatives. That is why a lot of 15-stone gull dogs and Asian mastiffs, which are used for illegal fighting on the Asian subcontinent, are now turning up in the United Kingdom. We have seen Australian cattle dogs and Russian bear dogs appearing here, which is a worry. People can get them. We could add and add to the banned list, but we will never get to the end of it. There are also cross-breeds and the issue of determining whether an animal is illegal.

We are going down the wrong road: we are not dealing with the problem. Of attacks on our postal worker members, 81 per cent occur between the garden gate and the front door. We need to deal with it and tackle that specific problem. When the door opens and the dog comes out, it does not matter what breed it is; it will do some damage if it is determined to do so and the owner does not have it under control. That is the problem for us.

Liam Kerr: On that point, I want to give Dave Joyce an opportunity to comment on the solutions, because that is what we are interested in. I was out with one of your members—a postie in Aberdeen—who was attacked in exactly the way that you describe. The dog was at the top of a stair and, according to your colleagues, everyone knew that it was going to go off. Eventually, the door was opened and it had the opportunity, and your member was attacked.

I am looking for a solution. What can we do about it? That dog is still at that house—because of the one free bite rule, I guess—so your members cannot go into the stair because, rightly, the Royal Mail is protecting them. However, you have a universal service obligation, so you have to go and deliver the mail to the other doors in the stair. There is a tension between what needs to happen and what is actually happening. The dog owner is in there, but the people need their mail. What is the solution? What can the committee do to ensure that such situations do not arise?

Dave Joyce: We can do a number of things. First and foremost, we have to clamp down on bad dog ownership. At the moment, any criminal can buy any dog at any time. They can have as many dogs as they want and can completely ignore the dogs' welfare and not keep them under control.

Liam Kerr: So, on a licensing scheme, which we have heard about, you would—

Dave Joyce: The CWU used to be completely neutral on licensing, and for many years we watched the debate between the Dogs Trust and the RSPCA, with one large organisation being in favour and the other opposed. However, over the years, we have looked at the issue closely and have come to be in favour of reintroduction of the dog licence.

As you know, the CWU works with all the Governments in the United Kingdom. We have worked with the Northern Ireland Government and looked at the licensing regime there. We estimate that, in Scotland, introducing a dog licence that cost £10 to £12 would raise £8 million to £10 million. As Alex Neil suggested, that money could be ring fenced and used specifically to put resources back into dog control at a time when funding is very short, cuts are being made left, right and centre and fewer people are being expected to do more—to perform miracles, in some cases. We believe that that is a good idea, and we would support it.

We would support anything that would improve dog control, because 3,000 of our people get noshed up by dogs every year. Some are so badly injured that they cannot continue in their job. We continue to face a massive problem that is not getting any better; in fact, it is getting worse. We need the police and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service to start doing their jobs properly: we need criminals to be held to account for the crimes that they commit. We are talking about serious aggravated offences under section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, but the people who commit them are walking away scot free. That must end.

The Convener: Thank you very much. I will close the session shortly, but I will give the final word to Alison Robertson.

Alison Robertson: I have a comment to make about the scenario involving a dog at the top of the stairs that was causing fear and alarm. The 2010 act makes it clear that the dog does not have to have bitten someone. The officer must be satisfied that the dog has been out of control and has caused fear and alarm, and that fear and alarm were reasonable reactions in the circumstances. If the dog in question was known to be a problem and was out of control, a dog control notice could have been served on the owner. A dog does not have to have bitten anyone for the 2010 act to apply.

Royal Mail is busy, as is the NDWA, and I know that it has its own protocols. It speaks to the owners of dogs when postal workers have problems. However, we do not hear about incidents involving postal workers until someone has been bitten. There is a need for improved reporting: there has to be a two-way street, whereby Royal Mail could say, "We're a bit worried about that dog at number 6." That way, we could go and educate the owner before someone is bitten.

Willie Coffey: It has been very moving to hear the evidence and the passion with which it has been given. I have accompanied postmen and postwomen on their journeys. Dave Joyce said

that 81 per cent of the attacks on his members have taken place between the gate and the front door. We have talked about legislation, licensing, interventions, training and so on, but what do witnesses think will stop the postman or postwoman being attacked between their going through the gate and getting to the door? Is it a case of training owners to be responsible or of locking up dogs before the postman arrives? How do we stop that?

Dave Joyce: We have worked closely with Royal Mail to mount huge campaigns on the issue. Every year in July, we have our dog awareness week, and we have distributed millions of postcards and posters through our customer service points. We campaign to raise awareness of responsible dog ownership. That has had some success: we peaked at 6,500 dog attacks on postal workers in 2007-08, and through our own efforts alone, we have reduced that by 50 per cent. However, we seem to have plateaued at 3,000 attacks a year.

The Convener: Mr Coffey asked specifically what would prevent attacks between the gate and the door. What does the CWU want that would prevent such attacks?

Dave Joyce: For a start, we need to reframe the way in which we apply and enforce the law. We must get rid of the one free bite rule. We also need to raise public awareness. In the debate that took place on 8 May last year, Christine Grahame made the point—it was well made—that the public know more about the smoking ban than they do about the dangerous dogs legislation.

The Convener: You want to raise public awareness, but public awareness of what?

Dave Joyce: We want to raise awareness of the dog control laws and of what is expected of people as responsible owners.

A huge range of penalties are available to the courts when people come before them, and there is inconsistency in the penalties that are handed down. Only rarely are substantial penalties handed down. I will give an example. In two very similar attacks, two postwomen had fingers bitten off when they were pushing letters through the letterbox. Although those were very similar injuries that were received in very similar circumstances, one court handed down a £9,000 penalty while the other court, which was in another part of the country, handed down a penalty of £100. That is not good enough. We have to do something about that. People need to realise that if they are bad owners, they will face the consequences in court. There needs to be public awareness of what the legislation says and of the requirement to be a good dog owner.

11:00

I agree entirely that we should introduce a licensing regime that ensures some level of competency, because most of the people about whom we are talking should not be dog owners at all. Anybody can become a dog owner—there is nothing to stop people going out and buying as many dogs as they want, with no limitations on breed, type or anything else.

I will end with a point about the one free bite rule. Could you imagine applying that to the offences of murder, drunk driving or causing death by dangerous driving? The situation is absolutely ludicrous, yet it goes on. I know of very many cases in which owners either have not been prosecuted or have been found guilty but have succeeded on appeal because it was the animal's first-ever offence or display of aggression, so the case has been thrown out of court. Those people are shielded by the inadequacies of the law.

Anas Sarwar: I share Dave Joyce's passion. I would like to pick up on Mike Flynn's comment about licensing being a good idea in principle that will fail if it is not backed up with resources in the real world. We have had a lot of discussion this morning about strengthening the legislation, increasing individual responsibility and imposing punishments, but in the absence of a budget line to back up the legislation with resources—whether from central Government, local government or the institutions that have to deliver—we will continue to fail. There needs to be a serious discussion about where the money comes from—about funding and delivery—or we will, even with the best intentions in the world, fail. Where will the money come from?

Alex Neil: It will come from the licence fee.

The Convener: Alex Neil has made a good suggestion about the licence fee. Mike Flynn also said that there seems to be no shortage of money to buy dogs, so apportioning some of that expenditure to regulation control—

Alex Neil: I bet that a lot of people do not pay VAT when they buy a dog. Are dogs VAT free?

Mike Flynn: That depends on whether the dog is bought from a reputable breeder—although Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs is recovering funds from illegal breeders who are not paying taxes, including VAT. There have been quite a few high-profile cases.

The Convener: We will need to close the meeting reasonably soon. Members have no further questions. Unless any of the witnesses would like to add anything briefly, I thank them very much for coming this morning and for their evidence.

11:02

Meeting continued in private until 11:19.

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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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