Control of Dogs – Airdrie – 10- December 2018

Experience of participants:
- The parents of two children who had been attacked by dogs;
- Three people whose pets had been attacked / killed by a dog;
- Two individuals who have experience in working with dogs.

The key points reflecting the views and experiences of those attending are listed below.

How have you been affected by an out of control dog?

Physical injuries to a child resulting in likely permanent disfigurement with further surgery required at a later date. People staring at the injury impacting on confidence and self-esteem.

Changes to childhood activities, no longer happy to go outside to play, anxiety around dogs that are off lead, losing confidence.

Diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), support required from CAHMS and counsellors.

Other unexpected anxieties developing which impact on schooling, siblings and other family relationships.

It can have a huge impact on the whole family and not just the person attacked. Those witnessing an attack have also been left affected.

A general fear of dogs developing where there never was before.

If you have reported an out of control dog, how easy was it and what was your experience of engaging with the local authority, police or courts.

Two dogs attacked a child, three adult witnesses were present and police action was taken. COPFS could only act to order one of the dogs to be destroyed despite there being three witnesses, as one dog had ‘no recorded previous bite record’.

The second dog was issued with a dog control notice. The owner moved to another area and there was no way of knowing if they were being monitored to ensure the dog control notice wasn’t being breached. There appears to be no way of tracking / checking that the order isn’t being breached as the new local authority doesn’t know it has been issued.

In a separate incident, one dog attacked a child in front of witnesses and no action was taken at all as the dog had ‘no bite record’.

Confusion around responsibility between local authorities and the police.

Communication between police / wardens and environmental teams is non-existent.
Confusion around what action can be taken (one local authority said no action could be taken as the person concerned denied being the owner despite the Act stating it is the ‘person in charge’).

Many dog wardens have another role and the dog aspect was added – i.e. environmental officers or pest control officers.

There are not enough wardens and many of those that exist have inadequate training.

Police don’t have enough time to deal with this issue.

In one instance where a family pet had been attacked and killed, the police officer had asked “what do you want me to do about it”.

Dog warden reported back to victim that he couldn’t do anything as the person in charge of the dog wouldn’t answer the door, the phone or respond to letters – therefore powerless?

The dog allows for control notices to be issued to owners of out of control dogs. The notice can include a requirement for; the dog to be muzzled, kept on a lead, banned from specific places or neutered. If you are aware of a dog that is subject to a dog control notice, do you feel it has made any difference to how the owner acts in respect of the dog?

Dog control warden told a person whose dog had been attacked that ‘something’ had been put in place in relation to the other dog but was unable to say what. Raises the question of how anyone is able to report a breach of a dog control notice when they aren’t allowed to know what the conditions are?

Dog owner moved to another area and no way of knowing if dog control notice is being breached.

What changes do you think need to be made that would help provide more protection from out of control dogs?

Agreement that the current law isn’t working.

More control over importing dogs / puppy farming as this can impact on a dog’s behaviour

Reintroduction of a dog licence (caveated that this is unlikely to change the actions of irresponsible owners)?

Need a better link / communication between police / wardens and environmental teams who deal with these issues.

Compulsory training for all police [rather than dog control laws being an elective course police officers can choose to attend].
Segregated dog areas in all public parks.

Should additional powers be given to the SSPCA?

Should a new body be set up to specialise in enforcement and supporting victims (including counsellors)?

Dog wardens not having enough power if the offender is able to just ignore them?

Automatic on-the-spot fines for dogs that bite.

Compulsory to be on a lead always, with the opposing view that if you impose this on dogs it may just add to behavioural problems.

Compulsory training when you buy a pup/ dog. Argument against this is that it would be the people who are responsible and don’t need targeting that would comply.

Specialist police officers who respond to dog incidents so the police are responding properly.