

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 7 May 2025
8th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

PE2083: Review the rules to ensure that no dog becomes more dangerous as a result of breed specific regulations

Introduction

Petitioner Katrina Gordon

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review The Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) (Scotland) Order 2024 and ensure that breed specific regulations do not restrict responsible dog owners from undertaking exercise and training routines which support the dog's welfare and reduce the risk of their dog becoming dangerous.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2083>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 12 June 2024.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new written submissions from the Minister for Victims and Community Safety and the Petitioner, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.](#)
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial position on this petition on 12 March 2024.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 563 signatures have been received on this petition.
8. Members will be aware that [the Welfare of Dogs \(Scotland\) Act 2025](#) was passed by the Scottish Parliament on 23 January 2025, and received Royal assent on 19 March 2025. The Act makes provision for a code of practice in relation to the acquisition of dogs; and to ensure public awareness and understanding of the code of practice.

Action

9. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
May 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2083: Review the rules to ensure that no dog becomes more dangerous as a result of breed specific regulations

Petitioner

Katrina Gordon

Date Lodged

14 February 2024

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review [The Dangerous Dogs \(Designated Types\) \(Scotland\) Order 2024](#) and ensure that breed specific regulations do not restrict responsible dog owners from undertaking exercise and training routines which support the dog's welfare and reduce the risk of their dog becoming dangerous.

Background information

To be well adjusted and under its owner's control, an XL Bully needs 2 hours of outdoor exercise daily, both walking to heel on a lead and a small amount of running off-lead. Without the ability to "run off" energy each day, excess energy builds up and a well-adjusted dog can quickly become an anxious dog, resulting in it becoming more dangerous in the home.

Vital control commands cannot be practised effectively on a leash or with a muzzle. A trusting bond is built up between owner and dog through daily off-leash practice of basic recall and other commands including "stop", "leave" (which prevents the dog from picking up an item of interest or chasing potential prey) and "drop it".

It is important that regulations do not curtail these existing successful strategies, which would result in owners losing the level of command, and dogs quickly becoming de-skilled and much more dangerous, not safer.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2083 on 12 June 2024

The Convener: Petition PE2083 is on reviewing the rules to ensure that no dog becomes more dangerous as a result of breed-specific regulations. The petition has been lodged by Katrina Gordon, and it calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) (Scotland) Order 2024 and ensure that breed-specific regulations do not restrict responsible dog owners from undertaking exercise and training routines that support the dog's welfare and reduce the risk of their dog becoming dangerous.

The petitioner tells us that an XL bully dog requires two hours of outdoor exercise a day, including being able to run off its lead, in order for the dog to be well adjusted and remain under its owner's control. It is the petitioner's view that recently introduced rules requiring XL bully dogs to be on a lead and muzzled while in public spaces risks making those dogs more dangerous.

The SPICe briefing draws our attention to the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity's announcement during the stage 1 debate on the Welfare of Dogs (Scotland) Bill, of the Government's intention to hold a responsible dog ownership and control summit later this month. The briefing also notes that one of the criticisms of the new restrictions is that they do nothing to address the issue of dog attacks that take place in private spaces—a point that Christine Grahame MSP raised during the Criminal Justice Committee's consideration of the Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) (Scotland) Order 2024 and the motion to annul the order.

The Scottish Government's response to the petition states that it

“understands the concerns expressed by dog owners about the impact that the new controls may have on their dogs.”

It goes on to say:

“There is however a balance to be struck between protecting animal welfare and protecting public safety.”

It is the Government's view that allowing an owner

“to exercise their dog in a public place while off lead and without a muzzle would be counterproductive to the aim”

of the regulations

“and would create too great a risk to the public.”

We have also received two further submissions from the petitioner, sharing her own experience and wider research on the negative impacts that the restrictions have on the welfare of dogs and, indeed, their owners, potentially making the dogs more dangerous. She notes again that the rules may have the unintended consequence of increasing the number of dog attacks in people's homes and gardens. The petitioner has repeated her call for the rules to be repealed.

Obviously, this is an issue that is very much in the public eye. It is also an issue around which there is some court action, which means that we are unable to discuss any specific individual cases. However, are there any suggestions about how we might proceed?

Maurice Golden: There is quite a lot in this that would be helpful to follow up with the Scottish Government. It is important that the committee notes that there is no such breed as an XL bully. It is the characteristics and type that have been subject to restrictions. We could follow up on the verification of those characteristics and the capacity of vets and other professionals to do that. It is important to ask the Scottish Government, for example, what training it is providing for owners to progress their dog to wearing a muzzle, which is one of the restrictions.

In addition to that, we should seek further details on the planned summit on responsible dog ownership and control, and ask specifically whether that will include owners of XL bully type dogs and provide the opportunity to consider the impact of the regulations on those owners, and what other measures might be put in place by the Scottish Government to ensure more responsible ownership and, ultimately, the welfare of dogs.

The Convener: Thank you for those suggestions, Mr Golden. I know that you have previously concerned yourself with animal welfare issues relating to dogs—in particular, I seem to recall you speaking about electric-shock dog collars.

Are colleagues content to keep the petition open and to make the inquiries suggested by Mr Golden?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C: Written submissions

Minister for Victims and Community Safety written submission, 11 July 2024

PE2083/D: Review the rules to ensure that no dog becomes more dangerous as a result of breed specific regulations

Thank you for your letter of 18 June 2024 addressed to the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, Jim Fairlie MSP, regarding [the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee's ongoing consideration of petition PE2083](#).

I am responding to you as I have portfolio responsibility for dog control and dangerous dog related policy matters, including the new safeguards that have been introduced in relation to XL Bully dogs.

The Committee can be assured that the Scottish Government recognises that there are a variety of views in this sensitive policy area and I fully understand that there are some people who will have disagreed with the policy and the steps taken. However, the Scottish Government decided that action was necessary and justified to respond to a situation arising from UK Government decision making.

As [I made clear in my statement to Parliament on 18 January 2024](#), the policy decision to introduce new safeguards in relation to XL Bully dogs in Scotland follows as a direct result of the UK Government decision to introduce controls on XL Bully dogs in England and Wales. With the UK Government failing to fully consider the implications for Scotland of allowing dog owners in England and Wales to evade the controls in England and Wales by disposing of their dogs in Scotland, the Scottish Government decided this action was needed to address growing public safety and animal welfare concerns. This UK Government decision was announced with no notice given to the Scottish Government, and with no prior wider public consultation.

As the Committee is aware, the Scottish Government is taking a two-stage approach for the new XL Bully safeguards in Scotland. The first stage of the new rules, as set out in The Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) (Scotland) Order 2024, came into force on 23 February 2024. From that date, XL Bully owners must ensure their dogs are muzzled and on a lead when in a public place. Breeding, selling, gifting or exchanging XL Bully dogs is also now prohibited. I would stress however that it remains legal to own an XL Bully dog.

The second stage of the new rules, as set out in The Dangerous Dogs (Compensation and Exemption Schemes) (Scotland) Order 2024, will come into force on 1 August 2024. From that date it will be an offence to own a XL Bully dog without an exemption. Owners of an XL Bully dog will therefore need to apply for an exemption on or before 31 July 2024 to be able to continue owning their dog. Full details are available on the Scottish Government website: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/xl-bully-dog-rules/pages/overview/>

Turning now to the specific points raised in your letter.

Summit on responsible dog ownership and control

The Committee is seeking further details of the planned summit on responsible dog ownership and control, specifically whether this summit will include owners of XL bully dogs and provide an opportunity to consider the impact regulations are having on XL bully dogs and their owners. This summit is planned to take place in September 2024.

Both Jim Fairlie and I agree that more can be done to improve public safety by ensuring that dogs are responsibly acquired, owned and looked after. The September summit will be in Edinburgh and will bring together attendees from a wide range of organisations, including Police Scotland, local authorities, veterinary bodies, public health and third sector organisations to consider how dog control and public safety can be improved upon. The summit relates to general dog control and dog welfare matters and does not have a focus on XL Bully dog. That said, those invited to attend will be free to raise issues of concern to them and it is likely the XL Bully dog safeguards will likely be discussed.

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of engaging with and hearing from XL Bully dog owners on the impact of the new safeguards on XL Bully dogs. The Committee may also wish to be aware that Scottish Government officials have previously met with the petitioner to discuss the XL Bully safeguards. In addition, Scottish Government officials have also engaged with a significant number of citizens, stakeholders, and XL Bully dog owners through responding to hundreds of items of correspondence and also through an XL Bully dog enquiries email mailbox to set out the Scottish Government's policy on XL Bully dogs. There has been advice and support offered when dealing with a range of queries on the safeguards on XL Bully dogs. The Scottish Government have engaged through written correspondence with the representatives from the 'Stop the XL Bully Ban in Scotland' campaign group.

Additional measures to ensure more responsible dog ownership and the welfare of dogs

The Committee has requested information on any additional measures that might be put in place to ensure more responsible dog ownership and the welfare of dogs.

As noted in the previous [letter to the Committee from the Scottish Government Criminal Law, Practice and Licensing Unit dated 12 March 2024](#), the Scottish Government takes dog welfare very seriously and is committed to the highest possible welfare standards. There is however a balance to be struck between protecting dog welfare and protecting public safety.

Before implementing the new safeguards in regard to ownership of XL Bully dogs, the Scottish Government met with a range of expert stakeholders to inform the way forward, including: the Scottish SPCA, the Dogs Trust, individual clinical dog behaviourists, the British Veterinary Association and the National Dog Warden Association.

The most appropriate approach for owners of XL Bullies who are concerned about the welfare of their dog is to consult with their vet who will be familiar with the dog, will be able to offer tests if appropriate, and will be able to monitor any changes in the dog's condition.

Prior to the action being taken in relation to XL Bully dogs, the Committee may be interested to know that a Scottish Government led Working Group was established in 2022 to assist with taking forward a commitment to review the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 ("the 1991 Act"). The focus of the review was on the criminal offence in the 1991 Act of a dog being dangerously out of control. The working group has undertaken this review, and the Scottish Government is now considering the wide range of views offered to determine what may be appropriate as next steps.

[The Minutes of Working Group meetings have been published on the Scottish Government website.](#)

There has also been a considerable amount of activity in the area of dog control policy. The Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 ("the 2010 Act") provided powers for local authorities to respond to incidents of dog owners allowing their dogs to be out of control in public places by imposing Dog Control Notices (DCNs). [The Scottish Government updated operational guidance for the 2010 Act in December 2020.](#) This reflected the first decade of use of the 2010 Act and built on best practice to assist local authorities in discharging their responsibilities.

The Scottish Government introduced a national DCN database in 2022 which is helping independent enforcement agencies (local authorities and Police Scotland) access information on dog owners who allow their dogs to be out of control.

Breed definition/conformation standard

The Committee has requested information on the verification of XL bully dog characteristics, including the capacity of veterinarians and other professional bodies to undertake this verification.

As the Committee will be aware, the breed definition/conformation standard developed by the UK Government for dogs in England and Wales is also being used by the Scottish Government for dogs in Scotland to ensure a consistency of approach across Scotland, England and Wales:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/applying-xl-bully-breed-type-conformation-standard-scotland/>.

The Scottish Government will not be involved in the assessment process. Owning a dog brings with it responsibilities and it is initially an owner led process. However, the conformation standard guidance document is also intended to be used to assist all of those involved in the operation of the safeguards relating to XL Bully dogs in Scotland. This includes law enforcement, local authorities and animal welfare organisations.

With regard to the capacity of veterinarians and other professional bodies to undertake verification, the guidance in relation to XL Bully dogs on the Scottish Government website is clear that it is the responsibility of owners to check if their dog is an XL Bully.

[The Scottish Government website contains information for vets](#) that clearly sets out that:

‘It is the responsibility of owners to check if their dog is an XL Bully. If they are not sure, they should follow the XL Bully safeguarding rules as a precaution.

As a vet, you do not have any enforcement role. We do not expect you to report XL Bully dogs or their owners to the police, or to keep copies of their exemption certificates.’

Muzzle training

The Committee has also requested examples of the training being provided to dog owners to help them introduce muzzle wearing for their dogs and ensure muzzles are used safely.

There are various organisations that can help with advice for dog owners on how to muzzle their dog. This includes:

- The Dogs Trust (<https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/dog-advice/training/outdoors/muzzle-training>)
- PDSA (<https://www.pdsa.org.uk/pet-help-and-advice/pet-health-hub/other-veterinary-advice/how-to-muzzle-train-your-dog>)
- Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home (<https://edch.org.uk/services/muzzle-training/>)

I trust that this information is of interest to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

SIOBHIAN BROWN

Petitioner written submission, 28 July 2024

PE2083/E: Review the rules to ensure that no dog becomes more dangerous as a result of breed specific regulations

It is unclear from the Minister’s response whether any affected owners will be invited to the September summit on dog control. I would be happy to attend this Summit if invited. As “it is likely the XL Bully dog safeguards will be discussed”, it is vital that the lived experience of those “safeguards” is represented. The primary impact of these is happening inside thousands of private homes – no organisation can represent that experience. To move forward wisely, the voice of lived experience must be included in any discussion on future dog control measures.

“The Scottish Government recognises the importance of engaging with and hearing from XL Bully dog owners on the impact of the new safeguards.”

Although I had a meeting to discuss these matters, there were no answers forthcoming from the Government official relating to the important public safety and dog welfare questions which are raised in this petition.

The Minister’s recent submission betrays a fundamental lack of understanding. She restates, “There is a balance to be struck between protecting dog welfare and protecting public safety” but both scientific research and lived experience indicate that this statement is false. A significant body of research indicates that any

reduction in dog welfare standards (muzzling, restricting running, etc) reduces public safety. Safety is therefore currently being compromised in XL Bully households and, [as stated in my submission of 04/06/24](#), in at least one home we may already be too late. This law, in my researched opinion, is making the households of affected dogs less safe, and that is a key issue which needs to be understood and addressed, to inform future dog control measures. The Government has offered no counter argument and appears to have failed to conduct any of its own research to explore this issue of public safety.

While the Government has “engaged with” stakeholders, it has failed to hear, understand fully, or respond with any form of counterargument or constructive proposal thus far. The response is always the same: guiding affected owners to the new rules and instructing us to comply.

The Minister states,

“Before implementing the new safeguards in regard to ownership of XL Bully dogs, the Scottish Government met with a range of expert stakeholders to inform the way forward, including: the Scottish SPCA, the Dogs Trust, individual clinical dog behaviourists, the British Veterinary Association and the National Dog Warden Association.”

But how many of these stakeholders supported the proposed policy? This exact question was raised in the discussion of the SSI at the Justice Committee meeting earlier this year and it was clear from the Minister’s response that, in fact, none of these experts were supportive of these so-called safeguarding measures.

The expert advice received by the Government, which was to avoid breed specific legislation and find alternative ways forward, was ignored. Most of the organisations named are members of the Dog Control Coalition, which made a public statement in October last year. It has not changed its stance since:

“The Dog Control Coalition agrees that urgent action needs to be taken to protect the public from out-of-control dogs, but we are disappointed that the [UK] Government hasn’t taken the opportunity to completely overhaul the Dangerous Dogs Act. With its continued focus on specific breeds, rather than a focus on prevention and implementation of tougher penalties for those owners not in control of their dogs, it is not fit for purpose.”

In terms of individual cases, the Minister suggests that “the most appropriate approach for owners of XL Bullies who are concerned about the welfare of their dog is to consult with their vet who will be familiar with the dog, will be able to offer tests if appropriate, and will be able to monitor any changes in the dog's condition.” Having a vet “monitor” and “test” a dog which has been adversely affected by this legislation does not solve the core problem of chronic stress, which research shows can lead to negative behavioural issues and aggression in dogs. The Minister for Safety is therefore suggesting that owners should simply monitor their dog as it becomes increasingly dangerous.

Regarding the verification of XL bully dog characteristics, the Minister responded:

“The Scottish Government will not be involved in the assessment process. Owning a dog brings with it responsibilities and it is initially an owner led process... it is the responsibility of owners to check if their dog is an XL Bully.”

I agree that owning a dog brings with it legal responsibilities: to care for the animal, meet its welfare needs, and keep it under control to ensure public safety. But no dog owner in Scotland knew, on acquiring their dog, that it might later become a legal responsibility to be able to identify its breed type. Identifying the origin of a crossbreed mongrel requires the expertise of a Dog Legislation Officer, who has been trained and has experience of hundreds of dogs. Most individual owners cannot accurately identify whether their dog is “of type” – they are just not sure. Owners are advised, if in doubt, to exempt the dog anyway, muzzle it and keep it on a lead, causing potential chronic stress to the animal, thus making it more dangerous. Ultimately the stressed dog might attack or even kill a visitor or a family member in its own home - all as a direct result of avoidable misidentification and legally enforced mismanagement of the dog’s welfare. The Government must address the central issue of dog welfare – every day that passes puts more lives at risk.

There remain some outstanding issues which the Petitions Committee might yet raise with the Government:

- What research has the Government done into how these measures are affecting the mental health of owners, and what research has been conducted into how the mental health of owners subsequently affects dog behaviour and ability to control dogs? This issue is also highly relevant to the safety impact of any future dog control measures.
- I understand that the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission will now be consulted ahead of the September summit. Can the Petitions Committee please request that a representative of SAWC will also be invited to attend, to represent the welfare of dogs?
- The issue of sentience – The Dangerous Dogs Act regards a dog merely as a “possession” rather than as a sentient being. A dog reacts to however it is treated – its behaviour changes. This is obviously not true of most possessions. Individually and collectively, we have a duty to respect the sentience of both dogs and owners, and to afford basic welfare rights to both.

The Scottish Animal Welfare Commission can investigate and advise:

- how the welfare needs of sentient animals are being met by devolved policy
- possible legislative and non-legislative routes to further protect the welfare of sentient animals
- the research requirements to provide an evidence base for future policy development.

Thanks again for continuing to investigate this matter.

Petitioner written submission, 22 April 2025

PE2083/F: Review the rules to ensure that no dog becomes more dangerous as a result of breed specific regulations

Thanks to the Committee for considering my petition on 12th June 2024, for making further enquiries of the Scottish Government, and for keeping the petition open.

The [Summit on Responsible Dog Ownership](#), which was held in private, has now reported. The key recommendations, to provide more funding to dog wardens and the police and to continue ministerial engagement with some stakeholder groups, are welcomed.

However, it appears that this summit did nothing to address or investigate the concern of this petition, which is that current breed specific regulations are resulting in otherwise healthy and well-behaved dogs being restricted in their exercise and welfare and this is causing them to become more dangerous, especially in the home.

As outlined in previous submissions, restricting a dog's welfare and capability to exercise is very likely to result in an increase in dog attacks in the home, and these attacks become more likely to be fatal.

Unfortunately, a mounting weight of evidence supports the concern raised by this petition. A recent well-researched report in the Guardian newspaper¹ outlining the effects of the ban in England and Wales states –

“In the first year of the ban, there have been nine reported fatal dog attacks in England and Wales. Five of these incidents have involved XL bullies. **All the attacks have been in people's homes”** [my emphasis].

Of even more concern to Scottish Ministers must be the situation in Scotland. A reported incident in Aberdeen² in December 2024 involved an American Bulldog which appears to have been regularly muzzled outdoors. This dog unexpectedly killed its owner in her own home. I would suggest this incident may have happened as a direct result of this dog having had its welfare and exercise restricted by the Scottish Government. This becomes an extremely serious issue, if dog restrictions are resulting in more human fatalities rather than making things safer for the public.

Death by dog attack was previously extremely rare in Scotland: a FOI request showed only two fatalities from dog attack from 2013 to 2021. So this one recent fatal attack in Aberdeen, committed by a dog which was apparently being kept either in accordance with the XL Bully restrictions or under the restrictions of a Dog Control Notice, is extremely concerning and should certainly ring alarm bells in the Scottish Parliament.

Christine Grahame MSP highlighted her ongoing concerns about the issue of dog attacks in private property at the Summit on Responsible Dog Ownership, but from the published recommendations report it appears that her concerns remain

¹ Guardian article: *'I was screaming at people to get my little girl': one year on from XL bully dogs ban*, 29 December 2024

² BBC News article: *Woman killed by dog was charged over earlier attack*, 10 December 2024

unaddressed. No actions were taken to relieve any of the restrictions, in order to help some of these dogs to become safer in their own homes.

However, the report also clearly shows that the group of dog experts who were consulted at the Summit “would like to see a repeal of the breed specific legislation in the 1991 Act. It is recognised that many stakeholders have concerns about this aspect of the 1991 Act”. This was suggested and agreed as a medium to long term goal.

I would urge the Scottish Government to give much greater urgency to repealing or at least revisiting the breed specific rules which they introduced over a year ago, because it is now absolutely clear that the unnecessary restrictions being placed on otherwise healthy and well-behaved dogs is causing some, if not many, to become more dangerous in the home and garden. These dogs’ welfare being restricted is bringing no benefit and instead is resulting in more dog bites, more injuries, and more deaths, not fewer.

Suggested potential steps:

- Every restricted dog to be visited annually by their local dog warden to check and ensure the dog’s welfare. (Understanding that the current restrictions do limit welfare and even the very best and most responsible of owners cannot currently address those welfare issues without active support from the government and the backing of their local police and dog warden. This is not just a responsible owner issue; this is a responsible Government issue.)
- Where dog welfare issues as a direct result of unnecessary restriction are raised by a dog warden, arrangements should be made to address these, perhaps by agreeing safe spaces where the dog can run off leash while muzzled or allowing a well-trained dog to be on-leash without a muzzle. Or identifying secure areas where the dog can run off lead without a muzzle. Actively addressing the safety of each individual dog is much more important than the implementation of blanket restrictions which are making some dogs less safe.
- Where a dog warden finds a dog dangerously out of control in its own home due to the owner lacking control, that dog should be removed and rehomed to a more suitable home where it can be trained and properly exercised.

Please, no more deaths as a result of these rules. Please do take responsibility for investigating the one fatal dog attack in Scotland so far and then, please, take appropriate action to prevent any more.

Thanks for your continuing consideration of this issue.