Public Petitions Committee
Thursday 19 November 2026
6th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

PE2251: Create Stronger and More Consistent Dog Control Measures in Scotland

Introduction

Petitioner	Katie Little
Petition Summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review and modernise the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010. Proposed measures for review and modernisation include the immediate detention of dogs involved in serious attacks, accountability for irresponsible owners, a national expert review panel for dog-on-dog fatalities, licensing for owners of large powerful dogs and professional dog walkers, limits on the number of dogs one person can safely control, and mandatory third-party liability insurance for all dog owners.
Website	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2251

1. This is a new petition that was published on 26 August 2026.

2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.

3. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 1,479 signatures have been received on this petition.

4. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.

5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.

6. The Committee has received submissions from the Scottish Government and the Petitioner which are set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

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

Clerks to the Committee
November 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2251: Create Stronger and More Consistent Dog Control Measures in Scotland

Petitioner:

Katie Little

Date published:

26 August 2026

Petition summary:

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review and modernise the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010. Proposed measures for review and modernisation include the immediate detention of dogs involved in serious attacks, accountability for irresponsible owners, a national expert review panel for dog-on-dog fatalities, licensing for owners of large powerful dogs and professional dog walkers, limits on the number of dogs one person can safely control, and mandatory third-party liability insurance for all dog owners.

Background information:

I call on the Scottish Government to modernise the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 to improve public safety, animal welfare and responsible dog ownership.

The petition seeks:

1. A full review of the Act.
2. Immediate detention of dogs involved in serious attacks or dog fatalities.
3. Accountability for irresponsible owners following serious dog-on-dog attacks.
4. A national expert panel to assess fatal dog-on-dog attacks and recommend appropriate action against both the dog and owner where necessary, ensuring fair, evidence-based, and consistent outcomes across Scotland.
5. Licensing for owners of large or powerful dogs.
6. Licensing, training and insurance requirements for professional dog walkers.
7. The introduction of limits on the number, combined weight, or overall strength of dogs that any individual may walk at one time, alongside a legal requirement that all dogs remain under safe and effective control.
8. Mandatory third-party liability insurance for all dog owners.

Annexe B: SPICe Briefing

Scottish Parliament Information Centre
Ionad Fiosrachaidh Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2251: Create stronger and more consistent dog control measures in Scotland, lodged by Katie Little

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition calls for the review and modernisation of the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 "to improve public safety, animal welfare and responsible dog ownership". Specifically, the petition seeks:

1. A full review of the Act.
2. Immediate detention of dogs involved in serious attacks or dog fatalities.
3. Accountability for irresponsible owners following serious dog-on-dog attacks.
4. A national expert panel to assess fatal dog-on-dog attacks and recommend appropriate action against both the dog and owner where necessary, ensuring fair, evidence-based, and consistent outcomes across Scotland.
5. Licensing for owners of large or powerful dogs.
6. Licensing, training and insurance requirements for professional dog walkers.
7. The introduction of limits on the number, combined weight, or overall strength of dogs that any individual may walk at one time, alongside a legal requirement that all dogs remain under safe and effective control.
8. Mandatory third-party liability insurance for all dog owners.

Key legislation

Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010

This gives powers to local authorities to issue dog control notices requiring a person to bring and keep a dog under control that has been out of control. The penalty for failing to comply with a notice is a fine of up to £1,000. It also gives local authorities power to apply for an order for the dog's destruction.

A dog is considered "out of control" if it is not being kept under control effectively and consistently (by whatever means) by the proper person and its behaviour gives rise to alarm or apprehensiveness that is reasonable in the circumstances. "Apprehensiveness" may be in relation to: the individual's own safety; the safety of some other person; or the safety of an animal other than the dog in question.

The 2010 Act required the production of statutory guidance. See in particular Part H of this guidance which outlines other relevant legislation.

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991

This bans certain dog breeds (Pit Bull Terrier and Japanese Tosa on the face of the Act – with Dogo Argentino and Fila Brasileiro later designated in regulations and XL Bullies later designated subject to an exemption scheme).

It also makes it an offence to allow any type of dog to be "dangerously out of control" (and makes it an aggravated offence if the dog attacks a person or assistance dog while dangerously out of control). The maximum penalty is imprisonment of up to 2 years and/or an unlimited fine. The courts may also order the destruction of the dog and/or disqualify the offender from having custody of a dog. The Act also gives police powers to seize dogs that appear to them to be dangerously out of control.

Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982

Section 49(1) makes it an offence for a person to allow any creature, including a dog, to cause injury or danger to any other person who is in a public place or to give that person reasonable cause for alarm or annoyance. Section 49(2) permits any person to apply for a court order in relation to annoyance caused by an animal in the vicinity of where the person resides.

Previous Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government action

Post-legislative scrutiny of the 2010 Act was undertaken by the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee in Session 5. Its July 2019 report includes discussion of various issues raised in the petition and made various recommendations. It stated: "The Committee believes that current dog control law is not fit for its purpose and calls on the Scottish Government to undertake a comprehensive review of all dog control legislation as a matter of urgency". The Committee's Legacy Report (March 2021) expressed frustration at the pace of change.

The Scottish Government responded to the Committee's initial report in September 2019 committing to undertake two reviews; the first looking at steps that could be taken to improve the effectiveness of the 2010 Act, and a second wider review to look at the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and other dog control legislation. In relation to the first review, the Scottish Government consulted on various proposals in 2019. In relation to the wider review, in 2021, the Scottish Government published a Discussion Paper on the Criminal Law Dealing with Dangerous Dogs, which considered options for increasing effectiveness of the section 3 offence in the 1991 Act (where a dog is considered dangerously out of control).

The Scottish Government published a Report on a Scottish Government Responsible dog ownership summit with key stakeholders on approaches to dog control and dog welfare in September 2024. The Scottish Government's response to the current petition states that following this summit:

> "The Scottish Government established an Expert Advisory Group to look at the various issues raised at the Summit to help determine what steps can be

> progressed in the short, medium, and long term. For example, in the short term what positive action can be taken that does not require legislation. Members of the expert advisory group include bodies such as Police Scotland, COSLA, Scottish SPCA, Dogs Trust, the National Dog Warden Association and the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission."

Two of the specific asks of the petition relate to licensing (one relating to owners of large or powerful dogs and another for professional dog walkers). The Scottish Government's response to the petition highlights a consultation it undertook in 2023 in relation to the licensing of commercial dog walkers. That consultation explored several of the issues raised by the petitioner. The consultation response analysis (published February 2024) highlighted a number of key themes:

- **Animal welfare –** the impact on animal welfare needs to be assessed before any new licensing requirements are introduced.
- **Consistency of standards –** "Any new licensing requirements must be proportionate and consistently applied and enforced".
- **Enforcement issues –** "there is an identified shortage of veterinarians to assist with enforcement work and undertake inspections" and "Local authority staff are unlikely to have the necessary expertise and knowledge to meaningfully undertake inspections and identify issues".
- **Local Authority resourcing –** "Significant budgetary pressures on local authorities means that staff are unlikely to be able to enforce any new licensing measures".

In response to Parliamentary Question S6O-05092 from November 2025, the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, Jim Fairlie MSP, stated:

> "Although the consultation demonstrated support for licensing, concerns were also expressed about the proportionality and cost of statutory licensing and about the capacity of local authorities to absorb and meaningfully enforce additional licensing requirements when budgets are already stretched. We are therefore assessing whether less onerous and more proportionate approaches, such as registration schemes linked to codes of conduct, could deliver similar outcomes to licensing. In the meantime, our immediate focus is to deliver on the proposal to regulate canine fertility businesses, due to the significant animal welfare concerns that are associated with that sector."

The Government's response to the petition confirms: "while we continue to keep the case for a future licensing scheme under review, we have no immediate plans to regulate the commercial dog walking sector at this time."

Key Organisations and relevant links

- Police Scotland
- Local authorities
- COSLA

- British Veterinary Association
- Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA)
- Dogs Trust

Mhairi Gavin
Senior Researcher
28 September 2026

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C: Written Submissions

PE2251/A: Create Stronger and More Consistent Dog Control Measures in Scotland

Scottish Government written submission, 22 September 2026

Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask[s] of the petition to be practical or achievable?

The Scottish Government recognises that dog on dog attacks are terrible incidents that can cause dog owners and all of those involved significant distress.

The following information may be of interest to the Committee. The law in the area of dangerous dogs and dog control is provided for across a range of legislation. The two main pieces of legislation being the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 ("the 1991 Act") and the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 ("the 2010 Act") referenced by the petitioner.

The 1991 Act provides for criminal law measures for dog owners and persons in charge of dogs, where a dog is 'dangerously out of control'. The 2010 Act provides for a civil regime in respect of dog owners who allow their dogs to be 'out of control'.

In general terms therefore, Police Scotland will deal with dangerously out of control dogs under the 1991 Act as this amounts to a criminal offence. Local Authority authorised officers (i.e. Dog Wardens) will deal with out of control dogs under the 2010 Act as this is not a criminal offence, but does allow for local authority officers to issue Dog Control Notices on dog owners.

Under the 1991 Act, a dog is deemed to be dangerously out of control if there is reasonable apprehension that it will injure a person or an assistance dog, whether or not an injury is caused.

An offence may be committed by a dog owner where a dog attacked another dog, if the owner of the other dog has reasonable apprehension that they could be injured if they tried to stop the dog attacking their animal.

It is of course for Police Scotland and the courts to ultimately determine whether a crime has been committed in any given situation.

The 1991 Act also gives power to any constable or authorised local authority dog warden to seize any dog which appears to them to be dangerously out of control when it is in a public place.

Meanwhile the 2010 Act introduced the Dog Control Notice (DCN) regime. This is a civil regime where local authority dog wardens are able to issue a DCN on dog owners if they deem it appropriate. The DCN is a notice which can contain a number of conditions, such as requiring a dog to be on a lead when in public.

A breach of a DCN is a criminal offence. DCNs are an essential part of helping keep communities safe and requiring responsible dog ownership. Scotland's DCN regime

is unique in the UK, and are focussed on preventing dog attacks from happening in the first place with the criminal law under the 1991 Act able to be used should dogs be dangerously out of control.

Within this context of general dog control laws, there was a Scottish Government consultation undertaken in 2023 in relation to the licensing of commercial dog walkers. Whilst there was support for this principle, concerns were also expressed about the proportionality and cost of statutory licensing and about the capacity of local authorities to absorb additional licensing work when staff resource and budgets are already stretched.

Indeed, local authorities in Scotland have made clear that without additional staffing and funding they are not in any position to meaningfully enforce further animal licensing work. Accordingly, while we continue to keep the case for a future licensing scheme under review, we have no immediate plans to regulate the commercial dog walking sector at this time.

What, if any, action is the Scottish Government currently taking to address the issues raised by this petition, and is any further action being considered that will achieve the ask[s] of this petition?

The Scottish Government published Guidance on the 2010 Act, in December 2020 that will be of interest to the Committee.

The Scottish Government also helped fund the creation of a national DCN database, which went live in early 2022.

The national database brings together the records of all local authorities into a centralised Scottish database, that is accessible by local authorities and Police Scotland.

Where a person subject to a DCN moves from one local authority to another, a national database is a valuable tool in helping local authority enforcement agencies to enforce that notice.

The Scottish Government also hosted a ‘Responsible Dog Ownership’ Summit in September 2024. The summit was an opportunity to bring together experts from a 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 Report is available on the Scottish Government website: Responsible dog ownership summit: report - gov.scot

The Scottish Government subsequently established an Expert Advisory Group to look at the various issues raised at the Summit to help determine what steps can be progressed in the short, medium, and long term. For example, in the short term what positive action can be taken that does not require legislation.

Members of the expert advisory group include bodies such as Police Scotland, COSLA, Scottish SPCA, Dogs Trust, the National Dog Warden Association and the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission.

A number of sub-groups of the Expert Advisory Group have been set up. The sub-groups are currently looking at specific areas of work, covering issues such as enforcement of dog control laws and dog welfare.

That work is ongoing, and the Scottish Government looks forward to seeing the recommendations of the Expert Advisory Group in due course.

General laws in relation to dog control are kept under review to help ensure they continue to help keep communities safe, but there are no plans for more general changes to these laws at the current time.

Is there any further information the Scottish Government wish to bring to the Committee's attention, which would assist it in considering this petition?

Further information about Responsible dog ownership is available on the mygov.scot website: https://www.mygov.scot/responsible-dog-ownership

The website contains information for members of the public on issues such as training and controlling your dog, walking your dog in public and the DCN regime.

Criminal Law, Practice and Licensing Unit

PE2251/B: Create Stronger and More Consistent Dog Control Measures in Scotland

Petitioner written submission, 15 October 2026

I appreciate the Scottish Government's acknowledgement that serious dog attacks cause significant distress and that dog control and public safety require continued attention. However, its response fails to address the central issue raised by PE2251: whether Scotland's existing legislation provides sufficiently strong, consistent and proportionate protection following a serious or fatal dog attack.

The Government has outlined the powers available under existing legislation. However, the existence of these powers does not demonstrate that they are sufficient or consistently applied. Our petition seeks to address the shortcomings of the current framework, particularly where a dog has already demonstrated capacity to inflict catastrophic harm.

Increasing dog-related injuries and inadequate national data

Scottish hospital admission figures demonstrate the continuing scale of dog-related injuries.

Hospital admissions increased by approximately 20% between 2021–22 and 2024–25, with a peak of more than 1,100 admissions in 2023–24. These figures represent hospital admissions, not the total number of attacks, and therefore do not capture the full extent of the problem.

A further significant concern is the absence of a comprehensive national mechanism for recording serious and fatal dog-on-dog attacks. Scotland consequently lacks reliable national statistics on the frequency of these incidents, their circumstances, the action taken against the dogs and owners involved, and any changes in their prevalence over time.

Without consistent national data, Scotland cannot accurately measure the scale of serious dog-on-dog attacks, identify emerging risks or properly evaluate whether existing legislation is effective.

The absence of a consistent response following fatal attacks

The Government highlights the availability of Dog Control Notices (DCNs), including requirements for leads, muzzles and training. While these are valuable preventative measures, the response fails to explain how the ongoing risk posed by a dog is assessed following a serious or fatal attack.

There is a fundamental distinction between preventing a dog from becoming dangerous and managing the risk posed by a dog that has already inflicted catastrophic injuries.

In June 2026, our beloved dog, Treacle, was killed in a horrifically violent attack on a public footpath. She was being walked on a lead when an off-lead Bullmastiff ran across the road and mauled her to death. The attack caused catastrophic injuries, and my husband sustained a broken bone in his hand while he was also attacked.

The attacking dog remains in our same estate, subject to restrictions of a lead and muzzle only. This is not proportionate consequences for the severity of the attack.

Our experience raises a fundamental question: what objective criteria determine whether such restrictions are sufficient following a fatal attack, particularly when the dog remains in close proximity to the incident and within a densely populated residential area?

The Government has not identified a nationally consistent process for assessing ongoing risk, nor explained how the severity of an attack, the owner's ability to control the dog, previous incidents and the safety of the surrounding community are considered.

Inconsistent enforcement and owner accountability

The national DCN database is a welcome development, but recording notices is not the same as establishing consistent national standards for the action taken following serious attacks.

The Government's response also fails to address how owner accountability should be assessed when inadequate control results in serious injury or the death of another animal.

I am calling for a consistent, evidence-based assessment of both the dog's behaviour and the owner's responsibility, with proportionate consequences.

The proposed national expert review panel would provide an opportunity to establish consistent assessment criteria and recommendations, reducing the potential for materially different outcomes in comparable cases across Scotland.

The Government's own work supports further scrutiny

The Government highlights its 2024 Responsible Dog Ownership Summit and the subsequent Expert Advisory Group. I welcome these initiatives, particularly given the Group's remit to consider improvements to dog control, enforcement and public safety, including potential legislative recommendations.

However, the existence of ongoing work does not establish that the current framework is adequate. I believe the specific proposals in PE2251 should be formally considered as part of this process, particularly the need for national incident reporting and a consistent approach to serious and fatal attacks.

The Government also acknowledges support for commercial dog-walker licensing but has no immediate plans to introduce it, citing costs and local authority resources. These are practical considerations, but they do not resolve the underlying safety concerns regarding training, insurance and the number of dogs one person can safely control.

Requests to the Committee

I ask the Committee to seek clarification from the Scottish Government on the following:

- **National data:** Will the Government establish a national system for recording serious and fatal dog-on-dog attacks, including the circumstances and enforcement outcomes?

- **Risk assessment:** What nationally consistent criteria determine whether restrictions are sufficient following a fatal attack?

- **Expert review:** Will the Government consider a national expert review mechanism to ensure serious incidents receive consistent, evidence-based assessments?

- **Legislative reform:** Will the Government formally consider all eight proposals in PE2251 and publish its response to each?

- **Accountability:** How will the Government ensure appropriate, proportionate accountability for owners following serious attacks?

Conclusion

The concerns raised by PE2251 are not new. In 2019, the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee concluded that existing dog-control legislation was not fit for purpose and called for a comprehensive review. It also highlighted the lack of consistent data as a significant barrier to assessing the effectiveness of the legislation.

Seven years later, the absence of comprehensive national data on serious dog-on-dog attacks and the lack of a consistent post-attack assessment framework remain significant concerns.

Treacle's death has exposed the devastating consequences that can arise when dog control fails. Our petition, which has over 1,400 supporting signatures, seeks meaningful reform to prevent similar tragedies.

I am asking for consistent national standards, reliable data, meaningful risk assessments and appropriate accountability.

I respectfully ask the Committee to keep PE2251 under consideration and seek a substantive response from the Scottish Government on the proposed reforms.

Treacle's death cannot be undone, but meaningful legislative change could help prevent another family from experiencing the same devastation.