

Written evidence submitted by Dog Control Coalition (PWA0055)

This response is provided on behalf of the Dog Control Coalition comprised of Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, Blue Cross, the British Veterinary Association, Dogs Trust, Hope Rescue, RSPCA and the Scottish SPCA, whose operations (rehoming and euthanasia) are impacted by Section 1 (S1) of the Dangerous Dogs Act (DDA) 1991, and The Kennel Club.

Given the purpose of the coalition, which is to work together to repeal Breed Specific Legislation (BSL) and towards effective and sustainable dog control legislation, we are responding to question 8 only.

8. What additional measures should the Government take to stop bad practices, improve overall domestic pet welfare, and assist those involved in supporting domestic pet welfare?

1. The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 has compromised the welfare of many dogs through the application of Breed Specific Legislation. This includes the extended periods of time dogs can spend in kennels during the court process, the conditions required for the legal keepership of exempted dogs and the number of prohibited dogs that are euthanased because the law prevents them from being rehomed.
2. The Act has also placed undue emphasis on four types of dog, creating the illusion of public protection despite robust scientific evidence showing that these four types pose no greater risk than any other type. The Government has consistently used the argument of public safety as a reason to refuse to investigate whether Section 1 of the Act has worked despite regular requests to do so from welfare groups, campaigners and Parliament. For example, in 2018, the EFRA Select Committee held an inquiry into controlling dangerous dogs and specifically recommended that an independent evidence review must be commissioned to determine whether the prohibited breeds/types present an inherently greater risk than other legal breeds; this has not been completed. Clearly, as the preventative element of the Act, if dog attacks continue to rise then this provision is not protecting the public as intended.
3. The legal framework for dealing with dog bite incidents is currently complex with a variety of laws available depending on the circumstances surrounding the incident. The approach is predominantly reactive and breed specific. We believe reform and consolidation of dog control legislation is long overdue and that BSL needs to be repealed and replaced with breed neutral legislation. We want to see bite incidents tackled using Dog Control Notices which are preventative, evidence-based and proportionate.
4. There is an urgent need for measures which improve the welfare of dogs affected by this law including the rehoming of prohibited types and better management of seized dogs. These include:
 - the establishment of an advisory panel of representatives with a standard range of specialisms including welfare, clinical animal behaviour and dangerous dog enforcement. This would provide a multi-agency professional approach to ensuring the welfare of seized dogs held in kennels.
 - Relaxing the conditions in which an exempted dog can be rehomed. This is a harsh stipulation which can only be circumvented if the dog goes to a known keeper. We believe that it should be made easier to rehome a Section 1 dog. This would allow rescues to

legitimately avoid having to put down well behaved dogs and would enable them to go to new loving homes.

- Currently, the onus is on owners of a potential banned type to prove that the dog is not of an illegal type. This should revert to the usual position whereby the Police have to prove on the criminal standard (beyond reasonable doubt) that the dog is one to which Section 1 applies.
- Change the system by which a dog can be exempted. Currently, it is only possible to obtain an exemption for a dog by Court Order. To expedite the process and save Court's time, provided the Police are satisfied that the dog would not constitute a danger to public safety.
- Removing the power to add more types/breeds to the list of banned dogs.
- Provision for a Court to allow the dog to be released on 'bail' pending the conclusion of the case even if this has been refused by the Police, to stop lengthy stays in kennels.

In conclusion, we believe reform and consolidation of dog control legislation is long overdue and that BSL urgently needs to be repealed and replaced with breed neutral legislation.

April 2023