

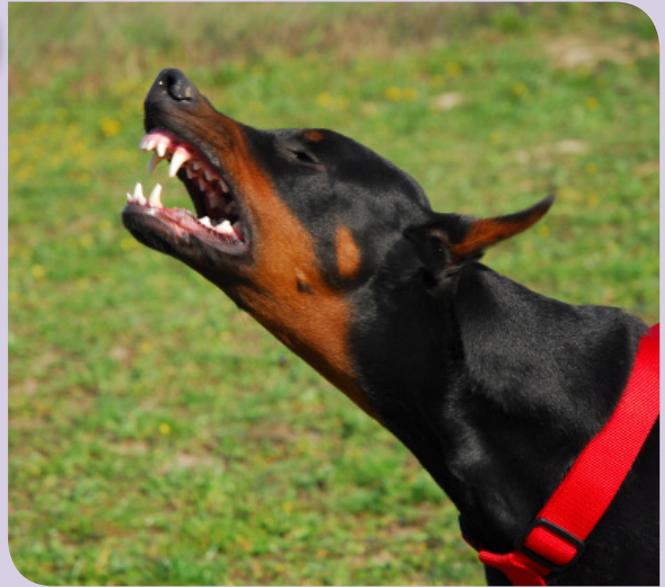
### BOROUGH / PROJECT :

# Wandsworth Council The Housing Microchipping and Dog Registration scheme



### PROBLEM :

Wandsworth council saw growing concern around dangerous dogs including two serious attacks involving dogs, and groups of youths seen training bull breed type dogs for fighting. They have also seen an increase in ownership of Pit Bull Terriers since 2010, as owners either disregard, or are ignorant of, the requirements of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. There has also been a trend with some dog owners who may be considered irresponsible, for ownership of crossbred bull breeds such as the Mastiff, American Bull Dog, and the Staffordshire Bull Terrier. These dogs have been used as status symbols, or used by some owners to cause fear, alarm or distress to others in the community.



### SOLUTION :

A local initiative that would both encourage responsible dog ownership by residents and assist in the investigating of dog nuisance and attacks in Wandsworth.

Changes were made to the tenancy conditions regarding the keeping of dogs that required owners of dogs to have their pets microchipped in order to obtain permission to keep the animal in council housing. The owners of all microchipped dogs are provided with a wealth of information to help them towards responsible dog ownership, tags advising that the dog is microchipped, and contact information at the council for help and support. In addition, the council has recently formed a partnership with the local branch of the RSPCA, to provide free neutering to dogs that are registered as part of the scheme. This will help to prevent the unwanted (and often unplanned) litters of puppies, that are then sold or given to other members of the community, or deter those dog owners who are only interested in breeding for profit, often producing puppies with inherent aggressive behaviours. The financial resource for this is not unlimited, so the council is concentrating its efforts on the bull breeds, which is the type of dog often preferred by those involved with crime and ASB involving dogs.

More recently, the council has set up regular dangerous dog liaison meetings with the borough police, looking at emerging cases and sharing intelligence. For the period 2011/12, there were approximately 15 Section 1 type dogs (Dangerous Dogs Act 1991) seized by police as a result of this partnership. The tenancy conditions have also been enforced to the full in two cases, where a NOSP application has been successful, and two cases where court orders were obtained and executed for the removal of the dog(s).

## BACKGROUND :

In 2008, following recent increases in serious assaults involving dogs, officers were considering local initiatives that would both encourage responsible dog ownership and assist in the investigating of dog nuisance and attacks in the borough.

A comprehensive review of the council's involvement with dangerous dogs and associated anti-social behaviour (ASB) had previously been reported to committee in January 2008. At that time, press reports showed that the number of dogs seized by the Metropolitan Police under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (as amended by the Dangerous Dogs (Amended) Act 1997) had increased from 173 in 2006/07 to 480 for the year ending 30th April 2008 (80 per cent of these involved pit-bull type breeds).

There had been two serious attacks in the west of the borough resulting in criminal prosecutions where the dog owners were council tenants or living in a council-tenanted property. In those cases further action was taken for breach of tenancy conditions. There had also been corroborated reports of groups of youths seen training bull breed type dogs for fighting on the Doddington Estate, SW11 (Queenstown ward) and all of these incidents have contributed to the need for further action to be taken to meet public disquiet over dog control issues.

## ACTIONS :

The logistics of having a dog microchipped needed to be as simple and easy as possible for the dog owner in order to encourage their compliance. A total of 56 roadshow events and opportunities were carried out in a number of key estates, and some parks and open spaces, and selected smaller venues, to provide the opportunity for the dogs to be microchipped.

In preparation of the scheme, a soft launch ran during November and December 2008, over four dates, for those dog owners who wanted to 'beat the rush'. During the soft launch, 250 dogs were microchipped.

The entire programme was widely publicised, with articles and adverts for the roadshow events appearing in every consecutive edition of the Housing departments 'Homelife magazine (distribution approx 35,000 per edition), and every edition of the council's 'Brightside magazine' (distribution approx 70,000 per edition), over an 18 month period covering 2008 to 2010.

Partnership working:

- This year, along with the Housing department, Wandsworth council has partnered with the local branches of the RSPCA, who are providing funds for the free neutering of dogs. The council has decided to concentrate on the bull breeds, and are offering this free service (which also includes transporting the dog from home to the vets and returned) only to tenants who have had their dog microchipped and registered.

- Post 2009, Wandsworth council set up a partnership with the police and established a single point of contact (SPOC). All parties meet every six weeks to consider emerging dangerous dog cases and ASB cases involving dogs. Since the SPOC partnership was formed (late 2012) the partners have, through the information gathered as part of the microchip and registration scheme:
  - Identified ownership of a number of illegal breeds (Pitbull Terrier type dogs, Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, sec 1), which has resulted in the seizure of 22 dogs.
  - Seen the prosecution of the owners of all of the 22 dogs
  - Supported 12 other dangerous dog prosecutions instigated by the Metropolitan Police, with the production of witness statements on the background information on the particular dog owner.
  - Provided information on dogs kept, in cases where a warrant is to be executed (not necessarily for dog issues) on an address, to assist the risk assessment of the officers carrying out that execution.

## OUTCOMES :

In 2009 1,500 dogs were microchipped. An average of five dogs per week since 2009 have been Microchipped and registered. To date, a data base with details of approximately 5,000 dogs living in the borough of Wandsworth is available. This also includes voluntary registrations, and other dogs that come to the council's attention.

## FUNDING :

It was felt that if there was a cost implication to dog owners, that they may be reluctant to comply, and use this as an excuse for non compliance. Wandsworth's housing department therefore decided to provide all tenants, leaseholders, and tenants of leaseholders, with free Microchipping. The implantation of the microchip is carried out by trained dog control officers, and selected housing officers. As 2009, the year of the introduction of this scheme, was expected to be very busy in terms of Microchipping dogs, the Housing department also funded the appointment of one temporary Dog Control Officer to help with the demand for this service. Since 2009, the temporary post has ceased, and all dogs are now chipped within existing resources.

A budget of £62,000 was agreed, to be provided from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and at the conclusion of the implementation of the scheme, approximately £52,000 of the budget had been spent. There are no further cost implications as all Microchipping and recording of data is carried out within existing resources. Since the conclusion of the initial project, approximately 300 dogs per year are microchipped and/or registered

## FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT :

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