

1st December 2009

Dog legislation must change immediately

The Mayhew Animal Home is extremely upset to hear the news of the young boy's death as a result of a dog attack and our sympathies go out to the family. This sort of tragedy must be prevented and the time is now to move forward with an immediate change in dog legislation and the implementation of a dog ownership registration system.

Dog attacks thankfully are not common but sadly there are too many irresponsible dog owners. National and local government needs to tackle the issue of responsible dog ownership head on. The Mayhew favours the return to a registration system making it mandatory for any dog owner to have a license. Owning a dog can be a 15 -20 year commitment which demands a high level of responsibility and duty of care both to the animal and to society as a whole. With the development of effective systems for television licenses and car MOT and tax registration, there is no reason why a similar system cannot be set up to deal with dog licensing. It should not be regarded as a penalty but as a sign of responsible dog ownership, together with providing the means to curb unchecked breeding, misuse and mistreatment of these animals.

Such as system needs to go hand in hand with tighter restrictions placed around the acquisition of pets from different sources such as the Internet, pet shops and breeders. The suitability of the owners of animals purchased from such sources is not checked sufficiently and there is little information supplied regarding responsible pet ownership, animal care and welfare needs, nor of how to make your animal safe in the home or out in public. As a busy but effective rescue centre, The Mayhew has a vigorous assessment system for new owners and monitors and controls which dogs go to which homes to ensure they are best matched to the particular circumstances. In addition no animal goes to its new owner unneutered.

Instead of leaving it in the animal welfare charitable sector to pick up the pieces, local Councils, government bodies need to address the cause rather than the effect of incidents such as the one in Liverpool by looking at it as a social and animal welfare crisis; they are

intrinsicly linked. As we see almost daily, categorising breeds under Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (DDA) has failed spectacularly and does little to prevent such tragedies. The Mayhew hopes this truly horrible incident will serve as a trigger to initiate some real and constructive change in dog legislation.