

The Mayhew response to government plans to toughen dangerous dogs law: wider welfare strategy needed

09/03/2010 -Today, the Environment Secretary Hilary Benn and Home Secretary Alan Johnson have unveiled plans to toughen existing laws in order to protect the public from dangerous dogs.

The Mayhew Animal Home, an animal welfare charity working at the forefront of this issue in London, welcomes the recognition that change to the Dangerous Dogs Act is long overdue, having witnessed firsthand the horrifying consequences from the misuse of certain breeds in our capital and the ineffectiveness of present legislation to address the root causes of this escalating problem. However, it must be remembered that the dog welfare issues now prevalent in our society are not just as a result of "dangerous dogs", but basically down to indiscriminate breeding, easy accessibility to and widespread irresponsible ownership of dogs across society as a whole.

We need to tackle the issue of anti-social behaviour with dogs, and amendments in legislation is a part of this, but it change will only happen if there is a wider overhaul of dog welfare strategy in the country, which should have as its basis prevention rather than draconian cure.

The Mayhew would welcome the opportunity to bring its wealth of experience on this issue to the debate as it was one of the first, forwarding thinking animal welfare organisations which has long been working with local authorities in London, the Metropolitan police and RSPCA to address this issue in a constructive manner.

The Mayhew believes that effective legislation must address issues of public safety, must place greater onus on the owners of these animals; not the dogs themselves. But it must primarily address the issue of where these dogs are coming from in the first place and why they are so misused and abused, otherwise nothing will change. The Mayhew would advocate a more effective agenda as follows:

- A repeal of breed specific legislation
- Make compulsory micro-chipping, which alone will not address the issue, part of a registration package for responsible dog ownership, which should include animals being neutered, vaccinated, checked regularly and insured.

- Tighter regulations placed on the trade in pets from pet shops, on the Internet and other forms of media, and priority given to the stricter monitoring of both registered and "backstreet" breeders.
- Government/local councils to invest in designated and trained personnel, such as Animal Welfare Officers, who can work alongside animal welfare charities, both with local residents and pet owners to prevent the escalation of this crisis and make our communities safer for animals and people alike.
- Government to consider funding neutering programmes, which presently many animal welfare charities strive to fund themselves with extremely limited resources

Caroline Yates, CEO