



## **PRESS RELEASE**

*Friday 18 November 2011*

# **New petition demands Government delivers dog law overhaul**

A new petition has been launched today by leading animal charities, the veterinary profession and trade unions to put pressure on the Government to deliver on its assurances and overhaul dog laws and bring forward new legislation in the Queen's Speech.

Twenty organisations – including the RSPCA, Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, Dogs Trust, The Blue Cross, the Communication Workers Union and the British Veterinary Association – have launched the petition, which would force a House of Commons debate if more than 100,000 people sign up on the Prime Minister's official website.

Members of the public can sign the petition by logging on to:  
<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/22631>

Despite last year's Defra consultation on dangerous dogs, and assurances from Prime Minister David Cameron to discuss the topic, the Government has failed to address what the organisations all agree is inadequate legislation that does not adequately protect the public, worker safety and animal welfare.

The petition demands that the Government brings forward a Bill in the Queen's Speech next year that consolidates and updates dog control legislation. It is hoped a new Bill would have a greater preventative effect by focussing on owner responsibility, give greater flexibility and discretion to enforcers and the courts, and enhance dog welfare.

The organisations behind the petition believe the current enforcement costs to the public purse are unsustainable and new approaches are needed that prevent incidents. This would save money in the short and long-term.

The public have been urged to sign the petition and share it on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to help reach the 100,000 signatures required to achieve the debate in the House of Commons.

Organisations behind the petition include Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, The Blue Cross, British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA), British Veterinary Association (BVA), Communication Workers Union, Dogs Trust, GMB, Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, International Institute of Risk and Safety Management, Kennel Club, National Dog Wardens Association, Police Federation, Prospect, Royal

Mail Group, Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, RSPCA, UNISON, Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, Unite and Wood Green, The Animal Charity.

Each organisation agrees the six key areas that need to be addressed are:

- **Consolidation of Legislation:** Any Bill must consolidate legislation concerning dog control; give greater flexibility and discretion to enforcers and the courts; include a genuine preventative effect; update some offences; improve public safety and animal welfare; and reduce the costs of enforcement.
- **Breed specific legislation:** This is not effective in tackling the real cause of the problem, which relates to the owner's actions or omissions rather than the type of dog concerned. We believe if political will is not there to repeal breed specific legislation, then amendments must be made to ensure better canine welfare and a clear strategy put in place to regularly review, and with the intention of, ultimately phasing out breed specific legislation.
- **Private Property:** The scope of updated legislation must be extended to cover all places, including private property, to ensure better public safety and animal welfare. It must also provide suitable defences for responsible dog owners, e.g. where someone is attacked and their dog defends them.
- **Permanent Identification:** To assist with encouraging more responsible dog ownership, all dogs should be permanently identified, such as with a microchip, so that animals can be matched to their owners and traceability can be improved.
- **Better Funding:** To support this there needs to be sufficient funding streams for dog wardens and police Dog Legislation Officer (DLO) roles so that the law can be adequately enforced and public safety and animal welfare improvements can be practiced. This will save money for the public purse in the short and long term, for example through savings to the NHS for treating dog-related injuries and costs of kennelling seized dogs.
- **Education and engagement:** This should go hand-in-hand with any changes to the law and many animal welfare organisations can provide resources for this. However, the Government should play a lead role in coordinating such work, especially within hard to reach areas, and ensuring it is properly evaluated for its effectiveness.

**ENDS**