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House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Parliamentary Select Committee - Report on 'Controlling Dangerous Dogs' and Recommendations to the UK Government:

To: All Branches

Dear Colleagues,

LTB 366/18 informed Branches that on 11 May 2018, the House of Commons, Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Parliamentary Select Committee had launched an inquiry into the legislation on dangerous dogs. LTBs 405/18 and 409/18 reported on the CWU written submissions made to the inquiry plus the televised oral evidence given to the inquiry at the House of Commons on 27 June 2018 by the National Health, Safety & Environment Officer. LTB 572/18 reported to Branches on the separate Scottish Government, Public Audit and Post-Legislative Scrutiny Committee Review of Dangerous Dogs and Dog Control Law, including the CWU Written Submission.

The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 was introduced to protect the public from dangerous dog attacks. In 2014, the Act was extended to include attacks on private property and also brought in tougher penalties and new extended Police dog seizure powers along with Community Protection Notices, amongst other improvements, following the CWU's successful 7-year 'Bite Back' Campaign.

Despite the positive changes to the Dangerous Dog Laws, there has been substantial debate about the effectiveness of this dog control legislation with a number of criticisms and concerns raised by the CWU Health, Safety & Environment Department particularly around inconsistencies with enforcement of the law by the Police and Local Authorities as well as interpretation of the law by Police forces, Crown Prosecution Services and the courts and finally, inconsistent and lenient court sentences despite two sets of guidance from the Sentencing Council.

3000 postal workers are attacked by dogs at work annually. Forty people (members of the public, adults and children) have been killed in dog attacks or died as a result of an attack since 2005. The number of yearly hospital admissions due to dog attacks has also risen by over 80% in the last decade, indicating the continuation of a very serious situation in the UK.

The Government is responsible for protecting the public, including Postal and Telecom workers from dangerous animals, so it is essential that laws evolve, are fit for purpose and work.

The House of Commons EFRA Select Committee of MPs have been investigating whether the Government's current approach is having the desired effect or not, and whether any changes to the law are needed to ensure that the public and workers are properly protected and additionally that animal welfare concerns are properly addressed.

The Inquiry Terms of Reference are to address the following questions:

- How effective is the Government's current approach to protecting the public from dangerous dog attacks?
- What changes, if any, should be made to the current approach and legislation?
- How can Local Authorities and Police forces be best supported in reducing the number of dangerous dog-related incidents?
- What lessons could the UK learn from other countries dealing with similar issues?

The EFRA Select Committee's Report entitled "Controlling Dangerous Dogs" which includes a number of positive recommendations to the UK Government has been officially published and released today (copy attached) and the report contents and recommendations will be very much welcomed across the Union.

Also attached is a CWU Press Release welcoming the report and commending the EFRA Select Committee. The CWU is now calling on the UK Government to implement the recommendations in full. CWU Regions, Branches and Representatives are welcome to forward the Press Release to local and regional press and media in order to spread the important message.

We will be pressing the Government to stop ducking the issue and living in denial of the facts that confront society in the UK with dangerous dogs, which is a problem spiraling out of control.

The Government should now accept the EFRA Select Committee's recommendations in full and get to work without delay in putting the report into action and into law.

The Select Committee has concluded that the Government's current approach to dog control is failing to protect people! It's certainly failing to protect postal workers with 3000 attacked by dogs every year.

With 23,000 Police officers cut from the UK's forces since 2009 and Local Authority cuts leading to the disappearance of Dog Wardens, it's not surprising that dog control has slipped down the priority list which is a point made by the CWU and reflected as a concern in the Report. In this respect the Select Committee recommends that there needs to be increased support for Local Authorities and Police forces to ensure they have the capacity to fulfil their duties.

Hospital admissions for dog attacks have increased by 81 percent since 2005 and is costing the taxpayer £millions and £millions on top of the personal tragedies, pain and suffering. Yet the Government stands by whilst those responsible, the irresponsible dog owners walk away without paying a penny!

There are an unacceptably high number of postal workers who are victims as well as children and members of the public, who suffer horrific life-changing injuries in these incidents as well as psychological distress and the Government needs to wake up to the facts and act now. This can't go on.

The issue of Breed Specific Legislation is a diversion away from the real problem of irresponsible owners. Postal Workers get attacked by every breed and sundry and banning certain breeds has achieved nothing. Any breed can be aggressive if it's basic needs, care,

welfare, wellbeing, training and socialisation is ignored. The problem is on the other end of the lead and many of these people should never be dog owners. The Government needs to focus on dealing with that 'bad owner' problem.

Section 10 of the Dangerous Dogs Act which is causing confusion in the courts must be addressed and the 20 pieces of various Dog Laws currently on the statute books need to be reviewed and consolidated into an easily understood law in line with CWU Conference Policy. As the Select Committee concluded – the present approach to dog control is plagued with deep structural problems.

The Government needs to endorse the Select Committee's key recommendation to 'commission a comprehensive review of existing dog control legislation and policy', with a view to focus on prevention, early intervention, and consistently robust sanctions for offenders' – that's essential.

The CWU wants to see effective preventative measures introduced, one of which is 'Dog Control Notices' which can be served on dog owners imposing legally enforceable requirements to train and control their animals and so avoid attacks, with legal sanctions for non-compliance.

The CWU also wants to see consistency from the courts with a full range of penalties, sentences and ancillary orders fully utilised which we don't see presently. Prison sentences and unlimited fines are available for aggravated offences but these are rarely used. Courts have been reminded that they must consider compensation in all cases where personal injury occurs but this doesn't always happen either.

Dog ownership disqualification is another order which is under-used by courts and despite the Sentencing Guidelines requiring the court to make a destruction order where the dog is a danger to public safety this rarely happens and a contingent destruction order is instead handed down which is breached in many cases.

The CWU also supports the recommendations on mandatory training and education courses for minor dog offences, similar to speed awareness courses for drivers as well as wider dog awareness training for schoolchildren, and running targeted awareness campaigns for dog owners and the general public on safe human-dog interaction.

The EFRA Parliamentary Select Committee Members are:- Neil Parish (Chair) (Conservative), Alan Brown (Scottish National Party), Paul Flynn (Labour), John Grogan (Labour), Dr Caroline Johnson (Conservative), Sandy Martin (Labour), Kerry McCarthy (Labour), Sheryll Murray (Conservative), David Simpson (Democratic Unionist Party), Angela Smith (Labour), and Julian Sturdy (Conservative).

A further report will be made following the Government's response to the Report.

Yours sincerely



Dave Joyce
National Health, Safety & Environment Officer