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The Rt. Hon Sir Alan Duncan MP
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From George Eustice MP
Minister of State

Dear Alan

Thank you for your letter of 29th August to the Secretary of State enclosing one from Debbie Connolly regarding changes she believes need to be made to the processes following dog attacks and in particular when someone is killed.

I consider that the systems now currently in place are adequate to address Ms Connolly's concerns and to help prevent future dog attacks. No death caused by a dog attack is acceptable and sadly some eleven adults and fourteen children have been killed by dogs in this country in the last ten years. However I do think we need to keep some sense of proportion; there are an estimated eight million dogs in the country so thankfully the risk of a death from a dog attack is relatively low.

Sadly, a number of tragic incidents have occurred, however when a person is killed by a dog there will almost always be an inquest conducted by a coroner. As you will know this is a detailed process and in the case of the death of Lexi Branson, for example, who was tragically killed by the family dog acquired from a rehoming centre, the coroner was able to identify issues with the dog that had been apparent prior to the dog attack. Similarly, in the case of the death of Jade Anderson, killed by a neighbour's dog, the coroner identified issues relating to lack of enrichment of the dogs' environment and poor welfare conditions as a contributing factor to the dogs' behaviour (more than one dog was involved). In that case the dogs' owner was successfully prosecuted for animal welfare offences.

These are just two examples where the due process has been able to identify aggravating factors relating to the dog or the way it was treated that led to a person's death.

There is much available advice from the experts on how to manage and care for a dog. For example when acquiring a dog we advise people to follow the puppy contract which is available on line and is promoted by both the RSPCA and veterinary organisations. Furthermore organisations such as the RSPCA and others are able to provide good advice on how to care for your pet and how to reduce the likelihood of incidents including dog attacks. Children are of course at particular risk and the advice includes crucial steps that can be taken by owners, such as not leaving a child alone with a dog.

In addition, the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 includes new specific measures to enable the police and local authorities to tackle irresponsible dog ownership



before a dog attack occurs. Practitioners can intervene at a much earlier stage and help prevent situations involving irresponsible owners of dogs becoming more serious. The 2014 Act includes streamlined measures to tackle anti-social behaviour including where such behaviour involves a dog.

Overall I do not consider that we need to add to the systems and procedures that the police and the courts have in place for identifying what might have caused a dog attack and to the advice that is available to the public on dog care and welfare.

George Eustice

GEORGE EUSTICE MP

I think her general point is a good one -
much of the problem stems from puppies not
being cared for properly or socialised at an
early age and we are also trying to deal with
that through improved licensing.