

PE1396/F

Alison Wilson
Assistant Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
T3.40
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

30th September 2011

Dear Alison

Re: Dogs Trust Response Consideration of Petition PE1396 (Abandonment of Staffordshire Bull Terriers in Scotland)

Thank you for giving Dogs Trust the opportunity to input information into this enquiry by the Public Petitions Committee.

Dogs Trust is the UK's largest dog welfare charity. Every year, we care for around 16,000 stray and abandoned dogs at our nationwide network of 18 re-homing centres – including two in Scotland, Glasgow and West Calder. No healthy dog is ever destroyed. We also promote dog welfare through educational, neutering and lobbying campaigns.

Please find below answers that are relevant to the Committees enquiry.

▪ **What are your views on the issues raised in the petition?**

Dogs Trust believes that the current trend of having a dog as a status symbol or as a weapon has led to the increase in the number of Staffies being abandoned. We also know of cases where Staffies and Staffie Crosses are being illegally bred for fighting. Because of these reasons, the breed has unfairly gained the reputation of being aggressive and dangerous. In reality they can be excellent family pets as they have a wonderful temperament and are great with people. Irresponsible dog owners are buying Staffies for the wrong reasons and don't take the time to properly socialise them. Like all breeds of dog – in the wrong hands and without the right socialisation and training, there can be problems. Because Staffies are powerful, muscular little dogs they can be potentially dangerous if not cared for properly.

Dogs Trust is very concerned that Staffies are being abandoned at such a young age. Our rehoming figures show that the majority of Staffies in our Rehoming Centres are under one year old. This means people are treating them as disposable items that can be 'upgraded' after just a few months – some young people will have owned their mobile phone for longer than their dog.

▪ **Can you provide the Committee with details of your own experience of the situation with reference to Staffordshire bull terriers?**

In 2010, there 104 Staffies and Staffie Crosses taken into our care: 41 in Glasgow (19 Staffie and 21 Staffie crosses) and 63 in West Calder (45 Staffies and 18 Staffie Crosses).

At our Glasgow Rehoming Centre, staff there are realistically turning away 20- 25 Staffies/Staffie Crosses per week. However, the dogs that are being requested to come into the centre are coming in for the same reasons as any other breed, such as relationship break ups, change of circumstances, moving property etc, and very few are breed specific.

It is the view of Dogs Trust view that there is too many of this breed than homes willing to take them on. Pure Staffies are easier to rehome than Staffies Crosses. A Staffie is generally a known temperament and size. Staffie Crosses can be very large and a mix of type - for instance, a Staffie crossed with a Labrador could have many of the characteristics of a Pit Bull Terrier which is a banned breed under the 1991 Dangerous Dogs Act.

There have been in the past trends of breed popularity. For a long time German Shepherd Dogs were an extremely popular breed but they are much less common now with numbers down in our Rehoming Centres. Again, Doberman dogs were once popular but are hardly seen now. Staffies are very popular now but if history repeats then the trend will change. We see this in the numbers of other bull breeds that we are being offered. Huskies are also increasing in numbers into our Centres – this is always a good reflection on what is happening in the breeding world.

Yours sincerely

Laura Vallance
Public Affairs Manager