



New Report – One Response

Background

In the year ending March 2024, an estimated **2.3 million adults** aged 16 and over in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse. Police recorded:

- **1,350,428** domestic abuse-related incidents
- **851,062** classified as crimes comprising 15.8% of all offences
- New data shows nearly **12.6 million people**, one in five adults, have been affected over their lifetimes.

This is not merely a human emergency. Animals are often caught in the crossfire. In households where abuse occurs, pets are frequently threatened, harmed, or killed as part of coercive control.

For many survivors, concern for their animals acts as a barrier to escape, and perpetrators may use pets to manipulate, punish, or force survivors to return.

With **60% of UK households**, 17.2 million homes, owning at least one pet, the overlap between domestic abuse and animal welfare is significant and should be treated as such.

Yet, despite the scale of this crisis, training around responses to domestic abuse where pets are involved remains inconsistent across the 43 police forces in England and Wales. A survivor should not face a postcode lottery when seeking safety and justice.

Our research

We contacted 43 police forces to ask whether they provide mandatory training on coercive control for first responders. All 43 responded, **41 (95%)** confirmed they do provide mandatory training. One force stated it was an 'ongoing project' and another refused to answer.

Training has included courses such as 'DA Matters', Coercive and Controlling Behaviour (CCB) and stalking awareness for neighbourhood teams, sessions as part of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) days, and PIP (Professionalising Investigation Programme) courses.

However, only **26 forces (60%)** reported that their mandated training covers the use of pets in domestic abuse – a troubling gap given the role animals can play in coercive control. Concerned about animals caught in domestic abuse, 687 of our supporters wrote to their Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) urging stronger protections for people and animals. Most Commissioners noted that operational policing decisions are beyond their control. Still, in several instances, they passed concerns to their safeguarding teams, who replied with more detailed feedback. One Commissioner stood out with a strong response, recognising the use of pets in coercive control and affirming the need to address this often-overlooked aspect of abuse.

Conclusion

The replies to over **650 letters** sent to Police and Crime Commissioners, along with **43 Freedom of Information requests** to police forces, revealed inconsistent awareness of how animals can be involved in domestic abuse situations.

This inconsistency persists despite pets being present in over half of UK households, and despite the inclusion of animal-related risk factors in both the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Violence (DASH) and Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA) tools.

Historically, police forces have not been the primary response agency for animal welfare.

We recommend that **safeguarding teams review their training and policies to include expert guidance on the link between violence towards people and animal abuse.**

Animal welfare laws can help to protect both people and pets.

All police officers attending a coercive control crime scene **should receive mandatory training** on the crossover between animal abuse and domestic abuse. As a model of training, we would recommend that conducted within South Yorkshire Police.

Take action today: make police training mandatory.

Contact Naturewatch Foundation

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Naturewatch Foundation is a UK-registered charity advocating for animals since 1991.

We engage in peaceful campaigns against animal abuse, lobby for stronger animal protection laws, and raise awareness through educational initiatives.