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*sgk*  
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*Dear Lesley,*

Thank you for your letter of 27 June to the Home Secretary outlining your concerns about the protection of livestock from dogs. Your email has only recently been passed to Defra. I am replying as the Minister responsible for animal welfare issues and I do apologise for the unacceptable delay.

You raise points regarding the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 and specifically your concerns that the police are not able to take action effectively under the Act and that there might be economic damages in rural areas as a result. While the Act imposes a maximum fine of £1,000 for allowing a dog to worry livestock, this is not intended as compensation to the owner of the livestock. If the owner of the livestock considers they should be compensated for their loss, then they have the option of a private prosecution against the offender to recover any economic damages incurred.

The action of allowing a dog to attack livestock could also be an offence under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, as the Act is not strictly limited to incidents where a person is in fear of being attacked and we have shared such case law with police forces that bears this out. In addition, as you noted in your letter, it is possible to use powers within the Dogs Act 1871. Section 2 of the 1871 Act allows for a complaint to be made by any individual (including the police, local authorities, etc.) to a Magistrates' court that a dog is "...dangerous and not kept under proper control". The court may make any Order they feel appropriate to require the owner to ensure that the dog is kept under proper control, or if necessary destroyed.

There are also anti-social behaviour measures, in particular the Community Protection Notice (CPN). These can be issued as a preventative measure, meaning that the owner or keeper of an out of control dog could be prevented from walking their dog on a farmer's land, restricting access to when livestock is not out and ensuring that the dog remains on a lead when in fields with livestock. There are seizure powers under this legislation and to breach a Community Protection Notice is a criminal offence.

While the powers set out above are useful for curtailing the behaviour of an individual animal, I believe that a key part of tackling irresponsible ownership of dogs is for more joined-up work among interested parties including police and local authorities. To this end, you may be aware that five police forces including North Wales Police are trialling new approaches to tackling attacks, including the gathering of data on incidents and liaison with organisations such as SheepWatch and local farming bodies. I look forward to hearing the results from this pilot work and for knowledge of best practice and improved data collection to be rolled out across the country.

Perhaps we might discuss these matters more fully with my officials present?

*I am really sorry for the delay.*

*Yours etc, John*