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Food & Rural Affairs

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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP  
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Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 30 November on behalf of your constituents about the XL Bully. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

We recognise that some people are opposed to the Government's decision to add the XL Bully to the list of breed types prohibited under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. However, the Government must balance the views of those who want to repeal or amend breed specific legislation with our responsibility to ensure that the public is properly protected from dog attacks.

We have seen an increase in dog attacks in recent years, including those causing injuries and fatalities, with the XL Bully being disproportionately involved in this rise. That is why we have taken decisive action to add XL Bully breed types to the list of breeds prohibited by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. We firmly believe that this approach is needed to reduce the risks to the public by this type.

The Government acted quickly to develop a definition for the XL Bully so the breed type could be banned in law. We convened a group of experts and other stakeholders to define the physical characteristics of the breed type. This included representatives from the police, local authorities, devolved administrations and animal welfare experts. This definition and guidance can be found on the Government's website, here: [Official definition of an XL Bully dog](#).

It is up to the owner or keeper to identify whether they think their dog may be in scope of the ban. We recommend taking a precautionary approach. This means if there is any doubt about whether a dog is an XL Bully or if it will grow up to be an XL Bully, it should be treated as though it is an XL Bully and the relevant requirements and restrictions complied with as they come into force. It is recommended that dog owners apply for the exemption scheme before the transition ends.

From 31 December 2023, all owners of XL Bully breed types must comply with strict conditions. This includes ensuring they put their dog on a lead and muzzle in public. Breeding, selling, exchanging, gifting, abandoning, or allowing these dogs to stray will be banned.

From 1 February 2024 it will be a criminal offence to be in possession of an XL Bully in England and Wales unless owners have a Certificate of Exemption. Further details on how to apply can be found here: [Prepare for the ban on XL Bully dogs](#). Owners will need to adhere to strict rules including holding public liability insurance and for the dog to be microchipped and neutered. Dogs that are younger than one year old on 31 January 2024, will need to be neutered by 31 December 2024. Dogs that are older than one year old on 31 January 2024, must be neutered by 30 June 2024. We recommend that owners arrange for their dogs to be neutered as soon as possible to meet these deadlines. Guidance is available on [GOV.UK](http://GOV.UK).

Alternatively, owners can choose to euthanise their dog by 1 February 2024 if they do not wish to keep them. The Government will pay a contribution of £200 per dog towards the costs associated with euthanasia that takes place before 1 February 2024. Details of how to [apply for compensation](#) can be found on GOV.UK.

We are also focussing our efforts on ensuring that the full range of existing powers to tackle dog control issues are effectively applied across all breeds of dog.

We have been working hard with the police, local authorities and animal welfare groups to help prevent attacks by encouraging responsible dog ownership, to ensure dog control issues are addressed before they escalate and to make sure the full force of the law is applied.

Owners whose dogs are dangerously out of control are already breaking the law, and we have a full range of powers to apply penalties to them. Under the Dangerous Dogs Act, any dog that is dangerously out of control can be euthanised and their owners put in prison for up to 14 years and be banned from ever owning a dog.

As part of this work, we are also considering the role of education and training (for both dogs and their owners) in reducing the risk of dog attacks, as well as considering how we can improve data collection and recording and enforcement practices.

Conclusions from this work are expected soon. These should address all aspects of tackling irresponsible dog ownership effectively, from prevention to robust, consistent enforcement, focussing on owners as well as on their dogs.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you need further information.

Yours sincerely,



**ROBBIE DOUGLAS-MILLER**