Name of your MP

House of Commons

By email

Dear insert name,

**THE RISING THEFT OF DOGS**

I am becoming increasingly concerned and worried about the rising trend in dog thefts, throughout the country.

As I am sure you will appreciate dogs are for many, a much-loved member of the family and play a central role in family life. When these animals are stolen it leaves a huge void in the lives of their owners and families and causes a great deal of emotional distress.

Demand for dogs skyrocketed during lockdown and prices have soared as a result. Current estimates indicate that the average price for a puppy can be in the region of £3000, making them an attractive target for both individuals and organised crime groups who are exploiting the situation by smuggling puppies from abroad and stealing dogs in the UK.

Dog thefts are now believed to be at an unprecedented high, with puppies stolen for immediate sale and adult dogs taken for forced breeding on puppy farms.

Police Forces across the Country are facing this challenge, which unfortunately is compounded with what appears to be a range of different types of modus operandi. Many Forces have issued clear advice and guidance to dog owners about how they can protect themselves and their pets, but I strongly believe there is scope to consider what further action could be undertaken to stem this particularly heartless crime.

There are several issues that I would seek your support in resolving:

Firstly, dog theft is not defined as a specific crime, with dogs classed as ‘property’ under the Theft Act 1968. In very simple terms, when a dog is taken, it is treated in the same way as the theft of a mobile phone, yet the emotional impact and pain caused is not even remotely comparable. **I would seek support for the theft of a dog to be made a specific crime recognised in new legislation** and any charges and/or sentencing should reflect the very real and devastating impact that such an offence has on pet owners.

The remaining three issues all concern preventative measures, aimed at disrupting these criminals and creating a more hostile environment in which they would have to operate.

**Chip readers** – Many dog owners will, very sensibly microchip their dogs. However, there are examples of criminal gangs cutting out these microchips in the dogs they steal. This can easily be facilitated through the purchase of a microchip reader, readily available to purchase online. It is arguable that access to such devices is unnecessary unless of course people require them in a professional capacity. I believe consideration ought to be given to the feasibility of limiting the sale of such devices to members of the general public.

**Licensing or passports** – One preventative measure for consideration would be the introduction of an effective licensing or “passport” regime for dog owners. Such licences would allow those in possession of dogs, or offering them for sale, to be able to identify satisfactorily to prospective purchasers the provenance of the animal for sale. This has the benefit of reducing the opportunity for criminality and hopefully reassuring potential buyers about the legitimacy of the seller, as well as potentially offering the implementation of effective animal welfare safeguards.

**Online advertising and sales** – A recognised route for the sale and disposal of stolen pets is via the internet and social media channels. I believe therefore, consideration also needs to be given to the rationalisation of available sale platforms. This could be achieved either through the creation of a mandated route for online sales through a dedicated website or through the creation of a nationally recognised website managed by a recognised animal welfare group. Whilst I recognise establishing such a platform would be a challenge; if it were supported with a national marketing and awareness campaign, which signposted potential buyers to this site, it could provide assurance and transparency about sellers and the provenance of the animal for sale. This in turn should also provide buyers with reassurance about the welfare conditions that the dog has been kept in and provide accurate information regarding the health condition of the dog.

Dog theft is on the increase and is a serious concern to pet owners both in insert county and across the country. Whilst owners can undertake several preventative measures to help deter thieves, we have seen criminals evolve their tactics and in some cases resort to violence against owners.

Addressing this issue will require us to work together to see what more we can do to stem the rise of this abhorrent and terribly distressing crime.

Yours sincerely,