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Pit-bull focus misses the point – Council report

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THE isolation of the pit-bull breed is failing to protect the public from serious attacks according to a new report by Derry City Council.

A newly drafted Annual Service Plan 2009-2010 by the Council's Department of Environmental Health states current legislation fails to recognise breeds such as the Doberman Pinscher, Rottweiler, German Shepherd are equally capable of posing a risk to

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the public.

The report says the Dangerous Dogs (NI) Order 1991 is time-consuming in its stipulation local authorities identify the pit-bull breed.

It also ignores the fact that other breeds can be "very dangerous" to the public.

Media interest in dog attacks was blamed for shifting public focus disproportionately onto the pit-bull with other dangerous dogs seldom getting mentioned. It said dangerous dogs legislation reflected this.

"There is seldom any reference to other listed dangerous dogs in the Order and certainly little cognisance of other potentially very dangerous dogs, which are often allowed to freely roam our streets," the ASP reports.

It adds: "There is little empirical evidence in Northern Ireland to suggest that the current legislation has been effective in protecting members of the public from serious dog attacks, as the vast majority of these have not been linked to any prescribed dangerous breed. There should be additional focus on 'the deed' as well as the breed of a dog when it comes to determining legislative controls and sanctions."

The Council report recommended legislation be modified to include further requirements for certain breeds.

"It must though at the same time be recognised that certain dogs by their very size and breed characteristics possess a greater ability to attack and leave someone maimed for life or indeed kill.

"To this end Derry City Council would recommend that consideration is given under Article 25B of the existing Dangerous Dogs Order to impose additional requirements on certain breeds of dogs, such as Doberman Pinscher, Rottweiler, German Shepherd to be leashed and muzzled when walked in public."

"It is hoped that the Dogs (NI) Order 1983 is strengthened and updated. For example, fixed penalty fines for straying, licensing and identification offences have remained static since 1983 and offer little deterrent to dog-owners being irresponsible.

"Fines should be increased significantly and Councils should also be allowed to retain payments of such fines to reinvest in dog control activities," the document concluded.

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