

BARK against dangerous dogs

Most dogs are loveable pets who live up to their title of 'man's best friend'. However, if not correctly handled by their owners, dogs can present a very real threat to residents. Words RACHEL GARDNER

Brent Action for Responsible K9's (BARK), London's first joint task force aimed at tackling the irresponsible use of dogs, has been formed to tackle increased dog-related incidents in the local area over the past year.

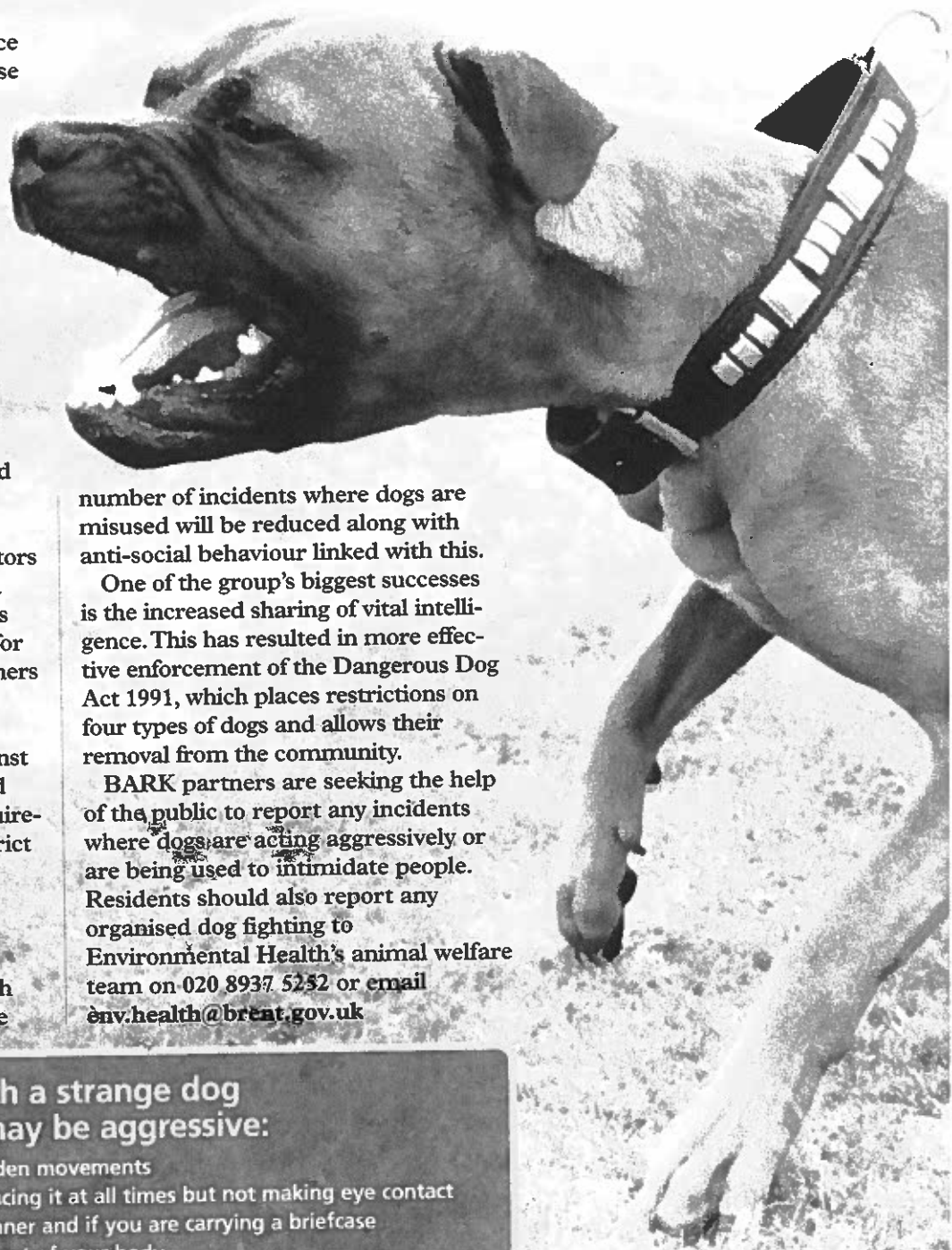
BARK will not tolerate the misuse of dogs and will use legal action against owners of dangerous dogs.

The RSPCA, Metropolitan Police Service, Mayhew Animal Home, Brent Council and Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) unveiled BARK at Fryent Countryside Day on 16 September.

Animal welfare officers and inspectors were on hand to provide information about dog ownership, distribute flyers on BARK and offer micro-chipping for dogs, along with free neutering vouchers for some breeds.

BARK will not tolerate the misuse of dogs and will use legal action against owners of dangerous dogs. This could result in a dog being muzzled, a requirement to keep a dog on a lead or restrict it to a defined area and, if necessary, certain animals being destroyed.

BARK believes that by educating the community on dog welfare and responsible ownership, together with enforcement where appropriate, the



number of incidents where dogs are misused will be reduced along with anti-social behaviour linked with this.

One of the group's biggest successes is the increased sharing of vital intelligence. This has resulted in more effective enforcement of the Dangerous Dog Act 1991, which places restrictions on four types of dogs and allows their removal from the community.

BARK partners are seeking the help of the public to report any incidents where dogs are acting aggressively or are being used to intimidate people. Residents should also report any organised dog fighting to Environmental Health's animal welfare team on 020 8937 5252 or email env.health@brent.gov.uk

Key tips for dealing with a strange dog or one that you think may be aggressive:

- remain calm – don't make any sudden movements
- walk away slowly from the dog, facing it at all times but not making eye contact
- talk to the dog in a reassuring manner and if you are carrying a briefcase or newspaper place it across the front of your body
- retreat to a safe position and contact the council's Animal Welfare Team.