

Owners of killer dogs may face life: Crackdown after 16 fatal maulings in eight years

- **Owners of killer dogs could face life in prison, according to a new proposal**
- **At the moment there is a maximum of two years inside**
- **Some 16 people have been killed by dangerous dogs since 2005**

By Daniel Martin

The owners of killer dogs could face life in jail under proposals put forward by ministers. Sixteen people have been mauled to death since 2005, but the law states dog owners can only go to prison for a maximum of two years.

Ministers have now launched a public consultation as to whether owners should face jail terms of up to ten years if their pet injures someone and life for a fatal attack.



Higher sentences for irresponsible owners who allow their dogs to attack members of the public have been put out to consultation by the Government

Killing or injuring a guide dog could also attract a maximum penalty of ten years.

The move comes months after Jade Anderson, 14, was killed by four dogs while visiting a friend near Wigan. Every year dogs are responsible for 210,000 attacks – around 6,000 of which lead to hospital visits.



The Government said it would introduce new measures to tackle out of control dogs

The CWU union representing postmen and telecoms engineers – who suffer 5,000 attacks a year – welcomed the move, pointing out that at present some owners are fined just £100 if their dog attacks. General secretary Billy Hayes said: 'Current sentencing arrangements do not match the serious nature of offences.'

'This consultation is very welcome and hopefully indicates the Government is serious about tackling the problem of irresponsible dog ownership.'

The consultation was launched yesterday by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Members of the public will be asked their opinion on the severity of punishments, with recommendations put forward in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill.

Animal welfare minister Lord de Mauley said: 'Dog attacks are terrifying and we need harsh penalties to punish those who allow their dog to injure people while out of control. 'It's crucial the laws we have in place act as a deterrent to stop such horrific incidents.' Last month Jade Anderson's parents, along with the parents of four-year-old John Paul Massey – who died after his uncle's pitbull attacked him in 2009 – presented a petition to Downing Street calling for David Cameron to take action to prevent more attacks.

Jade Lomas-Anderson (right) with her mother Shirley Lomas-Anderson. Jade was killed by four dogs in Wigan



Beware: A sign warning people on the house where Jade was savaged by the dogs



Four-year-old John Paul Massey was killed by a dog in a house in Wavertree, Liverpool

In February the Government said it would introduce new measures to tackle out of control dogs by changing the law to ensure irresponsible owners can be prosecuted regardless of where their dog attacks. But David Hanson, Labour's policing spokesman, said: 'The Government's proposals on dangerous dogs are weak. As the victims of dog attacks, select committees, the RSPCA and the British Veterinary Association have made clear, the Government should legislate for "dog control notices" which would give local councils and the police the powers they need to make sure owners are responsible and dog attacks are stopped.'

Crime prevention minister Jeremy Browne said: 'Dog owners who fail to take responsibility for their dogs must be held accountable.'

'This Government is taking urgent action to protect the public from out of control dogs. We are changing the law so owners can be prosecuted for attacks on private property and our anti-social behaviour reforms will give police and local agencies more effective powers.'

A report published in June by the charity Guide Dogs revealed attacks by other dogs on guide dogs are at an all-time high of ten a month.

A total of 240 attacks were reported between March 2011 and February