



The Four Stages to Better Enforcement

Part 2 of Improving the Effectiveness of Animal Welfare Enforcement



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Introduction

The last All-Party Parliamentary Report for Animal Welfare (APGAW) report on Improving the Effectiveness of Animal Welfare Enforcement set out the gaps we have in enforcement and some recommendations on the way forward. Since that time, we have developed the thinking through Parliamentary roundtables, wider NGO reports, FOIs and several 1:1 interviews with those at the frontline. As a result, we have come up with the **Four Stages to Better Enforcement** plan that builds on the key recommendations.

The stakeholders included in this work are listed at the end of the document, and it is clear that there is firm consensus across this broad set of NGOs, local councils, businesses and veterinary representation that, whilst we are a nation leading in animal welfare legislation, we are not utilising this foundation and are failing to really deliver on the animal welfare standards envisioned in legislation like the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the Animal Sentience Act 2022.

The EFRA Select Committee's 2024 inquiry into pet welfare and abuse concluded that 'animal welfare legislation must be consistently and robustly enforced if it is to achieve its statutory objectives.' (p23). Enforcement is patchy and many of those setting up businesses around animals are being let down by a lack of consistency and transparency. A good business struggles to distinguish itself from a bad business and consequently the public can unintentionally support poor welfare which was the opposite of the intent behind the Licensing of Animal Activities Regulations 2018.

The enforcement problem is not limited to companion animals and extends to farms, which are currently not required to be licensed. Reporting has found rates of inspection on farms has been consistently low and even where non-compliance with animal welfare law is identified by inspectors, local authorities have been reluctant to take enforcement action as evidenced in Animal Law Foundation data.

Whilst this is a Parliamentary report directed at Government; the APPG Animal Welfare is clear that the four stages to better enforcement are not for Government action alone. They are focused on empowering local government, businesses and the public as well as better harnessing the skills and knowledge within the well-developed charity sector. Like the Government, we do not want to see heavy handed enforcement and instead want to see a long-term shift whereby education and public awareness reduce welfare cases overall. We also want to see the powers within existing legislation used to their full effect, clear guidance around these powers and most importantly, accountability for this legislation.

Effective enforcement ultimately means fewer animal welfare cases and prevention being the main thread that goes through the core of any plan.

The report briefly sets out the Four Stages to Better Enforcement in a purposefully short and concise manner referencing the evidence and data collected across our broad membership.

4 Stages to Better Enforcement

1 Knowledgeable Inspectors

2 Making Better Welfare Pay

3 Empowering the Public

4 Stronger Partnerships

We do not need to keep repeating the same information and concerns as we take the view that the Government understands the issue and

is seeking to improve enforcement. We now need to prioritise clear action and a way forward.

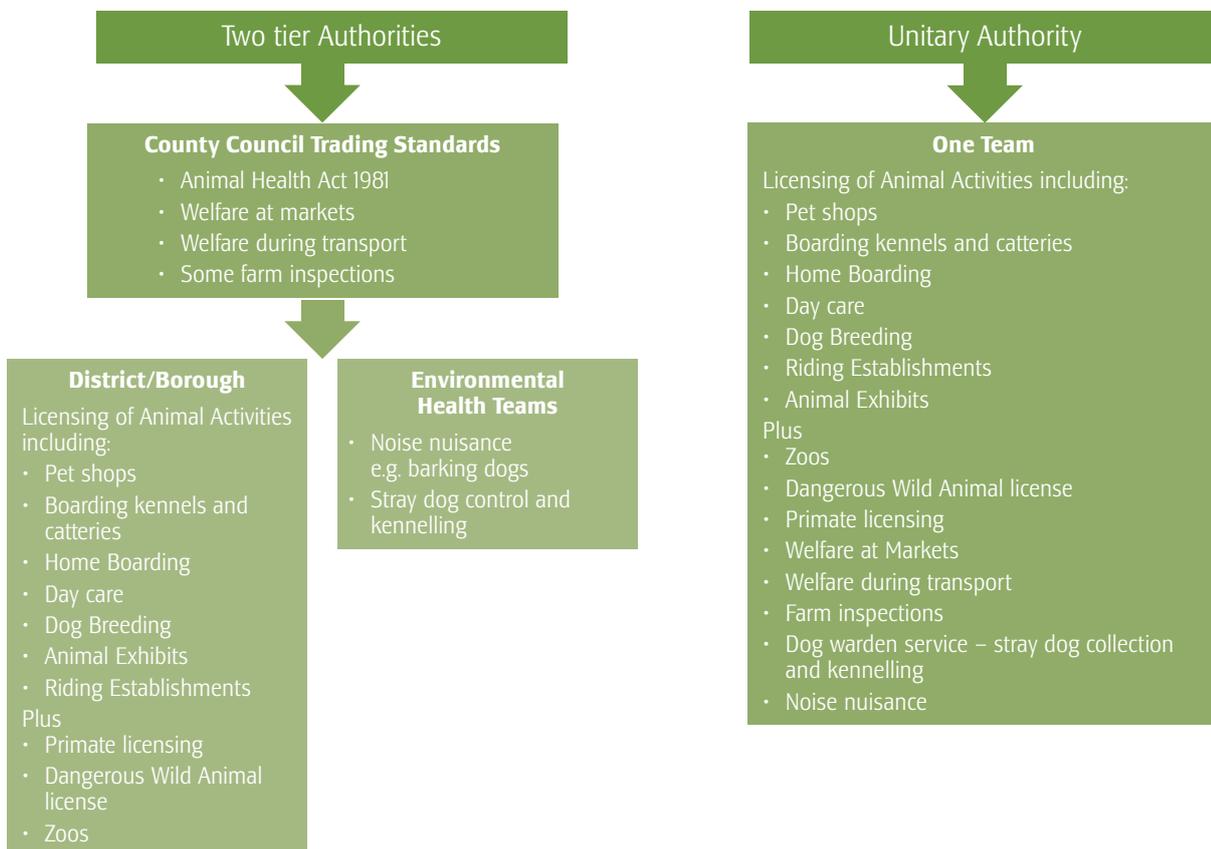
Stage 1: Knowledgeable inspectors

Delivering focus, expertise and support

FACT: Only with people who understand animal welfare can we ever effectively enforce animal welfare.

The Government’s White Paper on Local Government Reform helps to build on the pathway to some of the solutions identified in the last APGAW report relating to inspectors. This is based around the idea that we need consolidation of resources and to enable teams applying animal welfare legislation to have deeper expertise and experience based on more focused roles within their authorities – dedicated and trained inspectors.

Currently there are only 68 dedicated officers with animal specific roles across all 330 local authorities in England and Wales (FOUR PAWS 2025 report). The current system cannot provide the level of expertise needed owing to the spread of responsibility and resources. The responsibility for the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals Regulations (England) 2018 (LAIAR) was handed to the lower tier authorities – districts and boroughs – or unitary and metropolitan authorities already in existence. This was not debated during the development of the Regulations as it was assumed that the authority already undertaking licensing activities would deliver the legislation. Those authorities were largely licensing food



establishments and taxis and the skillset of doing that compared with inspecting sentient animals, often with highly complex needs, is vastly different. The training requirement was not robust enough to overcome this in most cases and that point is picked up shortly in this report.

In the various reports published since the implementation of the regulations, it has been evidenced that most of these lower tier authorities are only appointing inspectors for broad licensing purposes and not specifically for animal activities or for enforcing animal welfare in its entirety. This is largely because they have limited budgets compared to county councils and unitaries and so must carefully prioritise staffing costs and resource focus. The county councils and existing unitary authorities have bigger budgets and a statutory obligation to enforce the Animal Health Act 1981 and they may have been better placed to have originally taken on animal activity licensing under their existing skillset. Ultimately the system we believe would work better is to combine all animal welfare and health work under one team. Whilst we have the Animal Welfare Act 2006, its use is reactive, whereas it could better serve animal welfare by being proactive with LAIAR.

The White Paper on Local Government Reform does not directly address animal welfare, but the further proposed reorganisation of local authorities, plus enhanced powers and potential funding, could create a framework to improve or, conversely, challenge, local animal welfare enforcement alongside other measures outlined later in this report. The real impact will, of course, depend on how these new authorities choose to prioritise and resource welfare functions and bring them all together under an experienced team. Nonetheless, the scope exists to:

- Oversee a broader range of functions including animal licensing with other animal health and welfare responsibilities.

- Ensure simpler, standardised governance structures, enabling streamlined decision-making and clearer accountability with the public knowing which authority handles licensing and enforcement.
- A better resourced authority could lead to more consistent inspections and enforcement.
- Strategic authorities with combined responsibility for environment and public health could better integrate animal welfare into local policy, for example social services and preventing dog bites/attacks
- Improved funding certainty (via multi-year settlements) could allow local authorities to invest more in enforcement teams and training for welfare-related regulations.

There will be examples of unitary authorities already who may not be performing to the level envisioned above and where resources are still too limited. For it to be successful, there does need to be a commitment from leadership to properly fund these functions and make them more visible. There also needs to be other measures. For example, unitarisation enables better regional organisation, shared resource and intelligence and a more consistent and coherent approach to LAIAR, especially around fees and ratings which have varied considerably. To encourage this, national Government needs to direct unitary authorities to work across regions, share intelligence and work with other authorities to benchmark fees and costs.

Councils are licensing and regulatory enforcers, not general animal cruelty investigators, and there is a need for clearer partnerships that can help deliver the other components to obtain effective enforcement which will be explored further down under Stage 4. The thinking is that the work delivered for animal businesses and animal health should not exclude tackling and preventing animal cruelty but the resource is not sufficient to provide one simple solution. We must be more strategic

and able to utilise other wider resources to deliver robust and purposeful enforcement.

Training

The skills within local authorities can be improved without much additional cost and resources. The EFRA Committee concluded that a more consistent approach to training and accreditation for animal welfare officers is needed and that existing variation in training and enforcement puts animal welfare at risk. The first APGAW report also found this to be the case and set out a way forward to deliver improved training. Training of officers needs to remain a priority whether in the old structures or as we move into the new structures. Animal welfare science is complex, based on the needs of the animal and its sentience; therefore a breeding facility for example is very different to a taxi or food establishment.

The statutory duty to undergo training under LAIAR is positive, however the problem has been the lack of clarity over the quality of that training. Whilst it is managed by Ofqual, the content of the courses is not quality controlled, and they vary in content quite significantly from one to another. Some such courses consist of a couple of hours of an online process whilst others are more thorough and utilise practical training too which is incredibly valuable. LAIAR offers the foothold to drive better practice but broadly there should be ongoing training within the local authority team. Any officers involved in an activity that involves animal welfare including LAIAR should continue to hold a Level 3 certificate (or equivalent) granted by a body recognised and regulated by Ofqual. In relation to LAIAR specifically, their certificate must apply to that particular type of activity to count as qualified. The training programme must cover the application of the licensing conditions for each licensable activity separately and must contain a practical element. Defra should list what is included in the curriculum and approve training providers. The individual must demonstrate ongoing learning in

relation to animal welfare through online or practical means as set out in the curriculum. Or have a formal veterinary qualification recognised by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), together with a relevant RCVS continuing professional development record

Code of Practice

There are many examples whereby different local authorities or officers have interpreted and applied laws differently when it comes to animal welfare. Effective enforcement is based on evidence and risk, not on personal judgement. For both the public and those being regulated, trust is key and it is important that it is clear that enforcement is not arbitrary and there is no bias or heavy-handedness.

DEFRA and the APHA publish enforcement policies and operating instructions for animal welfare inspectors. These set out how inspections, investigations, and sanctions should be handled. They are useful but not detailed and local authority officers have told us that often they are unclear about what tools they can use and how to look at enforcement issues from different angles.

There is also the Regulator's Code which came into statutory effect in April 2014 under the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006. This requires all Local Authorities to publish an 'Enforcement Policy'. In order to bring together all of these pieces of policies and guidance and all of the available tools, it would be helpful to have a national code of practice for enforcement. This would give local authorities a clear, fair and defensible framework for how they regulate. It would also make it easier for multiple agencies to work together, for neighbouring authorities to coordinate inspections and intelligence sharing and to monitor local enforcement standards. There are wider benefits related to showing decisions were made fairly and lawfully and in compliance with national standards

A code could ensure:

- Similar cases are treated in similar ways,
- Businesses and individuals know what to expect,
- Enforcement is based on evidence and risk, not on personal judgement.

Strategic Networks

Knowledge can be gained through the sharing of experiences and there are many informal examples of inspectors and dog wardens reaching across to the other authorities to ask for help with a case. This could be formalised to improve knowledge sharing and develop skills. With a clearer structure for local government in the ambition to have unitary authorities across England, this makes it easier to build networks that can share resources and intelligence. APGAW proposed the setting up of a National Companion Animal Welfare Panel in the original report and work has now commenced on this body with regional local authority representatives stepping up from across the country to sit on the Panel. Led by an experienced local authority officer, Sharon Edwards, the panel has started to meet regularly and has demonstrated its potential for real value. There is enthusiasm for this Panel, however once it is established that keenness will only be sustained by the Panel having a strong voice and the ability to tackle the complex issues around animal welfare. That requires a good connection into DEFRA and support from central government that demonstrates they will listen to the ground views on the ground of those applying legislation.

Recommendation 1

Guidance from DEFRA to the existing and new unitary authorities on managing animal health and welfare responsibilities including participating in regional groups.

Clarification through the Animal Welfare Act 2006 of the need to have dedicated and appropriately trained animal welfare officers.

Impact Assessment

Moderate. The basis of this should already have been in place through the Animal Health Act 1981 and LAIAR. We could suggest removing LAIAR responsibility from lower tier authorities and handing over to upper tier now, but this move will happen in any event because of continued unitarisation. Review of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 will require Parliamentary time and resource, however as the Act is now coming up to 20 years old and was introduced by a Labour Government which has set the objective of leading on animal welfare, it seems this should be a priority particularly given that much has moved on with animal welfare science.

Recommendation 2

Work with local authority leads to develop a Code of Practice on Animal Welfare Enforcement.

Impact Assessment

Low. As all Local Authorities have a duty to publish an 'Enforcement Policy' already and many officers would be keen to work on a Code, it could be drafted by them with civil servant guidance and could sit as non-statutory guidance.

Recommendation 3

Tweak the statutory guidance to local authority inspectors on training, outline curriculum and approve appropriate courses with a practical element.

Impact Assessment

Low. Officers are already expected to undertake training but this ensures it is good quality training. The benefits to business and the public will be

considerable and may reduce workload in regard to complaints and issues arising in the long-term.

Recommendation 4

DEFRA to support the sector development of the National Companion Animal Welfare Panel and

request that local authorities all connect into a regional group.

Impact Assessment

Moderate. Mainly involves guidance, support and LAIAR review so would involve DEFRA team support for this.

Stage 2: Making better animal welfare enforcement pay

FACT: Effective enforcement capabilities can mean fewer welfare cases and long-term savings

APGAW recognises this Government faces significant challenges and that legislative time is constrained. Therefore, it is vital that any solutions presented are not solely about improving animal welfare but also provide outcomes for the public and show a pathway towards reduced costs for local government. We believe an effective enforcement plan can save public money and better protect both animals and people.

The right licence fee

Currently lower tier authorities have had to take on the delivery of LAIAR with only the use of licence fees to cover the cost. Licence fees cannot be used to make a profit. Nonetheless, the evidence has strongly shown (see recent [Pet Industry Report](#), and [FOUR PAWS UK report](#)), that several local authorities are setting fees on a random and opaque basis which shows no real clarity of the cost of applying the legislation and they do not appear to have factored in enforcement and ongoing costs. This was not the intention of LAIAR 2018 where a specific goal was to charge fees on a cost recovery basis so as to smooth over the large discrepancies in fees between local authorities pre LAIAR. The

recent FOUR PAWS UK report identified a high level of public complaints, for example 4,164 public complaints regarding dog breeding establishments between 2018 and 2023, and seemingly very little response to that regarding terminations of licences or use of penalties with only 35 licences revoked from 9,882 issued.

From understanding the ongoing cost of issuing a licence better, there will be opportunities to get a fairer licence fee that may increase in some areas and reduce in others. Whilst there are cost differences in areas for staffing and resource, it seems too broad a gap that in Guildford a breeder will pay £1,000 for a licence and in Somerset North they will pay £58 for a licence. There is no evidence to show that Guildford is offering more benefits to the licence or more enforcement than Somerset North. It could be that some authorities spend more time completing a report that has useful points within it and is of benefit to the licence holder whilst others are doing a tick box approach. Nonetheless, the result of such a discrepancy will either be dog breeders not applying for licences in Guildford or legitimate businesses moving to North Somerset. There are signs that this is happening with dog breeders migrating from the south to the southwest where costs are lower. Regional working will help pin down the real cost better and ensure a fairer system for the businesses across that region.

Benchmarking can be done at the national level to understand the difference across individual council areas and ensure the system is working effectively and local authorities are charging the right amount to cover application and enforcement of licences. By law, a licence fee can include “all activities...directly relating to...the licence, and any subsequent direct costs such as enforcement” so LAs should be ensuring they have the funding for enforcement of pet businesses. Breeders, and indeed all pet businesses, should be getting a fair deal, and the price should cover the ability to take up public complaints effectively and deal with any enforcement matters. Good enforcement will not only result in better welfare but also the protection and support of honest businesses.

Reducing Dog Bites and Abuse

In England in 2023–24, there were 10,678 hospital admissions classified as being “bitten or struck by a dog.” Historically data from the Health and Social Care Information Centre shows there are 3x higher hospital admissions for dog bites in the most deprived compared to the least deprived areas. Areas with the highest rates include Merseyside, Durham, Darlington, Tees and West Yorkshire. 24.1 admissions per 100,000 people in the deprived area compared to 8.1 admissions per 100,000 people in the least deprived. There are several reasons for this which have been researched by University of Liverpool and the RSPCA. The key objective is simply to reduce dog bites and to keep people safe and having knowledgeable teams within local authorities and communities can be a valuable part of the solution. Fewer dog bites will reduce costs to the NHS and keep people safe from risk of more serious attacks and possible fatalities.

Additionally, animal cruelty can serve as an indicator of domestic violence, warranting greater attention in child safeguarding assessments, however, routine safeguarding assessments often fail to consider pets or involve multi-agency

collaboration, a gap highlighted by NSPCC, RSPCA and the Links Group. Dedicated animal welfare officers would be able to support social services and family support teams within the small local authority better ensuring support to families with a dog that poses a risk and also better practice in recognising the links between animal abuse and child abuse.

Cutting costs

One of the biggest problems facing local authorities is the cost of seizure of animals and other related difficulties such as finding places to kennel dogs or stable horses. APGAW received numerous inputs from local authorities outlining cases in which costs had been in the tens of thousands. There is good evidence that local authorities are no longer investigating illegal dog breeding businesses due to cost issues on seizure and the lack of kennelling space. This is likely to increase as local authority budgets get squeezed even more. As a consequence, the increasing direction from decision makers in those authorities was that animal welfare enforcement needed to be avoided owing to the risk of unknown costs. This ultimately means either not going out looking for any cases or not taking the action required when a case arises. The Chartered Trading Standards Institute found that 84% of local authorities cite cost as a primary barrier to acting against animal neglect and cruelty with several cases costing councils over £100,000 per case – and in one extreme instance, more than £1.5 million. This is largely because delays in securing court orders to rehome or treat animals means that they can be in temporary accommodation for months or years, which can also significantly impact their welfare. If we want to save public money with local authorities, then reducing the costs around seizure will be an effective way of doing so. More importantly the holding of animals' post seizure for lengthy periods is highly detrimental to animal welfare.

The need to reduce the length of time animals must be held has been well rehearsed already by many APGAW members including Dogs Trust, RSPCA and Battersea, so it does not need to be set out in this short report. The solution is to take the Scottish model in which once the animal is seized, intention to dispose can be issued immediately with the owner having 21 days to appeal under the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers)(Scotland) Act 2020. This allows the SSPCA to rehome animals, making that decision as inspectors under the act and this applies to animals seized under the act. Owners who want to appeal the decision must do so via a civil court. Most owners do not do this and there has been no impact to reputation or negative headlines. It has so far saved the SSPCA £1.5m of boarding costs in the first year. There have been no challenges to early disposal of animals in Scotland in the four years since the 21-day system was introduced. If there is a safeguard for the small number of cases in which the owner does want to fight to keep the animal, it seems that this method of ensuring a substantial reduction in seized animals and the subsequent costs is highly effective.

It is also worth highlighting that, whilst it not a direct comparison to a cruelty or neglect case, the intent to deliver a more flexible approach to the length of time around seizure is apparent in the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Bill (for England & Wales. In the Bill it states

“If the owner of the dog does not claim it and pay those expenses before the end of the period of seven days beginning with the day after the day on which the dog was seized under subsection (1), a constable may dispose of the dog.”

Making Traceability Work

Local authorities can spend a significant amount of their limited resource for animal welfare seeking ownership of stray animals

because they must go across myriad databases seeking the right one that holds the identity. With more than twenty UK compliant databases now in operation and no single point of search for vets and local authorities to access records, as well as a lack of resources for local authorities to enforce the legislation, we have not seen the desired impact from microchipping that would add to more effective enforcement. Battersea research since 2016 has shown a steady decrease between then and 2023 in microchip compliance rates among dogs, which has a seeming correlation with the increase in stray and abandoned dogs seen since the pandemic. Dogs Trust's Stray Dog Survey collects data from local authorities on the provision of microchipping provisions within their area. In 2023-24, of the dogs who were recorded as having a microchip on arrival at local authorities (and for whom it was known whether their chip had the correct details), only around 38% reportedly had correct owner details on their chip. The remaining dogs either had chips with incorrect owner details (47%), unregistered chips (13%) or the database was not recognised (1%).

To help local authority inspectors improve the microchipping legislation we could make three changes – a single point of search for records help across the databases, the requirement for dog breeder information to be held on the microchip record and powers for use of Fixed Penalty Notices for non-compliance and updating the database within a set period. This would significantly reduce time pressure from local authorities as well as improving the application of the relevant law. It would also be very helpful to have the requirement that the microchip records when a bitch gives birth and the chip of the bitch is held against the puppy records.

Better Integration & Data Sharing

One of the main issues APGAW heard during its meetings and evidence collection is the need for better information and intelligence sharing and more integration between the different parties doing enforcement work. This was particularly relevant to the effective delivery of farm animal welfare enforcement and inspections. There is information and data collected through several sources from the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway and the Rural Payments Agency, Animal Plant and Health Agency and local authorities but there is no central place to be able to assess risk and see where there are significant gaps in inspections as well as information on potential welfare issues.

We have touched on the need for more sharing of resource and intelligence through the Panel but the strong solution to effective enforcement is being able to prioritise use of the resources, being able to pinpoint, using risk-based intelligence where focus needs to be and being able to identify people who may have been involved in animal cruelty or neglect cases previously. This needs to be done on a shared digital platform that can be accessed by approved parties.

In 2014, the then Government ran a pilot called “Find It” which was a tool to share data across four Defra agencies (Environment Agency, Rural Payments Agency, Natural England and Animal and Plant Health Agency), one local authority (Staffordshire County Council’s Trading Standards Animal Health team) and Defra. The project aim was to gain a good understanding of the benefits and requirements associated with embedding a data sharing tool. The limited amount of feedback which can be found sets out that it was very useful for the parties involved, however it was not rolled out and it is unclear why it was not developed.

Integration of data and information is critical for better enforcement but also for long-term savings and effective systems which can reduce the burden

on good business through a risk based system underpinned by sound intelligence. Government should look again at “Find It” or comparable systems for use in animal welfare enforcement.

Recommendation 5

Support regional organisation and input into the National Companion Animal Welfare Panel and the use of benchmarking on fee setting and transparency over true costs

Impact Assessment

Low. The main work will be done by the sector in forming the Panel and will involve limited online meetings for local authority inspectors once a quarter as well as potential working groups depending on their interests. The only central Government resource is civil service engagement.

Recommendation 6

Issue best practice for local authorities on working with social services and family support teams with clear mechanisms and cross reporting agreements.

Impact Assessment

Medium: Will require everyone to be trained in recognising potential abuse and/or neglect and knowing what to do in regard to reporting or referring.

Recommendation 7

Develop the model to reduce seizure time of animals taken in by the local authority.

Impact Assessment

Moderate. Will require amendments to the current Act and resource from Government

Recommendation 8

The introduction of a single point of search for records held across all microchip databases is needed. A requirement for dog breeder information to remain as a permanently accessible part of the microchip record for enforcement purpose and additional powers for local authorities to issue Fixed Penalty Notices under the Animals (Penalty Notices) Act 2022 for non-compliance with microchipping regulations for dogs and cats

Impact Assessment

High. Does require amendment to Microchipping Regulations and Fixed Penalty Notices Act as well as development of a database.

Recommendation 9

Consider shared information and data IT systems for animal welfare to enable better risk-based approaches.

Impact Assessment

High: It would involve investment and resource to set up such a system but it would lead to long-term savings and improved transparency around enforcement. This would be of benefit both to animal welfare but also importantly animal health and biosecurity.



Stage 3: Empowering the public

FACT Education must be the cornerstone of any effective enforcement and improvement to animal welfare

Effective enforcement works in the following way:

1. Education and information
2. Improvement notices, face to face conversations and warnings, FPNs
3. Seizure, prosecution

It is the first of these, education and information – that can really drive a wide uplift in animal welfare broadly meaning that the 5 domains can be understood and delivered for animals across the nation. We can go from animals existing to animals thriving. Education and information should form the bulk of enforcement activity.

The public cares about animal welfare greatly, which has been demonstrated several times through polls, campaigns and the postbag of most Members of Parliament. It is the public who want to protect animals and see the highest levels of welfare in the majority with a minority who are responsible for poor welfare either deliberately through acts of abuse and cruelty or ignorantly through a lack of awareness. The public's support for effective application of animal welfare law needs to be utilised and the foremost way of achieving this is through pet businesses and the basis of LAIAR. These Regulations have significant scope to be improved and make a real difference to delivery of animal welfare.

Businesses can only receive good and valid education if the officers themselves know, and understand, what they are talking about which goes back to having properly qualified animal welfare officers.

Registration

Foremost in the breeding and sale of pets, how an animal is bred, socialised and introduced to a new owner, sets the fundamental basis for good welfare.

Dogs are owned by 28% of UK adults, and it is estimated at least 900,000 puppies (based on PDSA and UK Pet Food dog population statistics) are sold each year. Freedom of Information surveys of local authorities in late 2024, found there are 2,897 licensed dog breeders across the UK and Ireland, collectively keeping around 26,000 adult female dogs for breeding and the majority (81.3%) are in England, with 2,355 licensed dog breeders. Based on this figure, it is established that 14.6-19.5% of UK dogs are currently bred by licensed breeders. Between 2018 – 2022, an average of 54,455 dogs were commercially imported into the UK annually, accounting for approximately 5.8% of the UK dog population. In 2024, The Kennel Club registered 187,772 puppies in the UK. From these estimates in the region of 75-80% of UK dogs come from other sources, including unlicensed breeders, legal and illegal, and illegal imports. These all go without any checks, assurance or standards and there is no traceability.

APGAW recognises there is limited appetite for extra regulation or bureaucracy, but there is a need to better protect the public and animal welfare and within the current system some people face oversight through licensing with the added costs and resources whilst many others avoid any oversight at all. This has created an unfair and opaque system and without robust enforcement in place, unethical breeders and businesses can undercut the good breeders and businesses whilst causing suffering for the animals under their care.

The clear solution to this is full traceability, something APGAW has supported for some time by means of a registration system supported by identity verification for any party breeding or selling pets if they are not already identified as a commercial operator through the licensing system. This identifies the person breeding or selling even if not for a clear profit and drives the notion of responsibility. Enabling the public to request either a licence number or a registration number that they can check with the local authority gives some sort of tool to try to avoid illegal imported pet sellers or backstreet breeders who will often sell under aliases, avoiding tax and without any repercussion if the animals fall into poor health.

Registration would not involve a mandatory inspection like licensing but could involve unannounced spot checks. The Northern Ireland Government is currently considering a registration scheme after holding a public consultation on the issue and there could be useful lessons taken from the outcomes of that consultation to consider. The local authority would simply allocate and log a registration number on their records and issue it to the breeder. All of this could be done by means of an online process which would not be burdensome. There could be discussion as to a small fee around £5-10 to cover administration. The registration will fall into a database and would be verified against a council tax bill or another form of I.D. It would need the ability to cross check on both addresses and names and the registration process would need to include microchip details of the breeding bitch and the stud used.

On application for a registration number, the licensing requirements can be made clear to applicants, who can be asked to confirm they don't require a licence. The inclusion of a registration number will provide additional ways of monitoring breeding levels than currently exist

and will therefore facilitate identification of those who require a commercial breeding / sales licence removing the cumbersome burden from local authorities to check.

Comparable registration systems include Electoral Registration whereby the applicant applies online and provides a National Insurance number for verification. Additionally food registrations require someone to submit their details via .gov or to the council's own portal and then the council upload the information to the FSA with ratings. In Scotland registration of private landlords involves an application submitted through the central Scottish Landlord Register portal, covering all 32 councils and involving a fee. The registration number is then used on all adverts. The local authority can issue fines for non-compliance. There is also the tax conditionality system which HMRC is seeking to introduce to areas like the activities under animal licensing and in which someone applying for a dog breeding licence would be subject to a tax check upon renewal demonstrating the will to join up the processes.

It is already an offence of not complying with a registration scheme under section 13 AWA so the pathway always exists to take this proposal forward

Registration would mean that local authorities would no longer need to utilise most of their time searching for non-compliant businesses across various advertising platforms and would simply be able to see any businesses operating that are not registered or licensed. Local authorities should then publish registration and license numbers on their websites. The public can be simply instructed to only use sellers or services which have a registration or licence number that can be checked against a local authority system for assurance if required. By doing this, the public finally has a tool to use to make sure the seller is legitimate, and welfare is protected.

Innate Health Assessment

One of the biggest welfare issues facing companion animals is the deliberate breeding of dogs to make them look a certain way that appeals to trends. For example, the short to non-existent muzzles that restrict breathing, the excessive skin folds that lead to sores and infection, the bulging eyes and inward eyelashes that can cause daily pain and discomfort. Under LAIAR 2018 it states:

Regulation 6.6(5): “No dog may be kept for breeding if it can reasonably be expected, on the basis of its genotype, phenotype or state of health that breeding from it could have a detrimental effect on its health or welfare or the health or welfare of its offspring.”

Yet breeding of this nature is prolific and accepted mainly owing to public ignorance on just how badly it impacts welfare. Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, Section 9(2) (c) it is set out that the animal must “be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease” and under Section 9(2)9(b) (c) the animal must “be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns.” The outcomes of bad breeding practice to achieve desired appearances means often the animal is unable to express normal behaviour and may exist in discomfort or pain on a constant basis. There has been very little enforcement utilising Regulation 6.6(5) under LAIAR and local authorities are reluctant to risk the significant costs that could arise from taking forward a prosecution with its unknown outcome.

It is highly significant in APGAW’s opinion that we have a current situation in which deliberate breeding practices cause serious and extensive welfare issues and there is no enforcement or improvement plan in place.

The best way of ending this breeding of animals with poor health and welfare, is to drive a long-term change in demand from the public and

create awareness of the issue. That requires providing the public with tools like the Innate Health Assessment (IHA) tool developed under APGAW in partnership with Professor Dan O’Neill at Royal Veterinary College and a wide range of important experts and organisations from RSPCA, Battersea, BSAVA, BVA and many others. The IHA has been developed to take the complex problem of conformation in dogs which has been evidenced through years of data gathering and analysis and put it into ten criteria which are easily understood by a layperson and for use to enforce Section 6(5) of the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals Regulations 2018.

Frontier Economics, one of the largest economic consultancies in Europe, has undertaken an independent economic appraisal of the potential benefits of introducing the Innate Health Assessment into the regulatory landscape for dog breeding in the UK. Their comprehensive report concluded that:

“The IHA tool addresses a significant market failure in the dog breeding sector by targeting the welfare and health risks caused by extreme conformation – risks that likely impose material and avoidable costs on pet owners, veterinary professionals, and society... By helping to shift societal norms towards healthier, ethically bred dogs, the IHA could serve as a low cost but high impact regulatory lever.”

Such a tool can assist local authority inspectors in enforcing existing legislation and also put more power into the hands of the puppy buying public so that they understand how to drive good welfare in breeding.

Breeding problems are not isolated to dogs alone. More and more people are buying purebred cats. According to the data in Cat’s Protection Cats and Their Stats most recent report for the first time over 50% of people getting a cat in the past year bought a purebred. The IHA tool is currently being adapted for use with cats too.

Expertise of Third Parties

The third way of empowering the public is largely through the expertise of the welfare sector and how local government works with them. The welfare charities are trusted and well thought of by the public. They utilise professional teams and communicate their messaging with care and consideration. Across the spectrum of APGAW members – RSPCA, Dogs Trust, Blue Cross, Battersea, Cats Protection, Woodgreen, NatureWatch, Hope Rescue – they can reach hundreds of thousands of people through social media and press.

There are, however, cohorts of people they will not reach or only reach in a limited sense, and this could be the more difficult to reach segments of society broadly, including more vulnerable or deprived groups. Local authorities will often have better contact with these groups through their social work teams, family support programmes, children's centres and even resident associations, local community hubs and forums. There are benefits to wider thinking around how we deliver the education and information around animal welfare which could reduce dog bites and attacks, curb backyard breeding, spot both early-stage animal and child neglect. This goes back to the earlier point about dedicated animal welfare officers within authorities who can create that bridge between other services in the authority. A charity like Dogs Trust has worked within deprived communities to deliver free microchipping and dog training and this could help engage some of the harder to reach families that need support. If there is a more functional and strategic relationship between the charities and the local authorities, there could be a better use of their shared resource and a way of sharing intelligence such as a concern over a potentially dangerous dog living with children.

Update the Welfare Codes

For England, under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the Secretary of State can issue codes of practice setting out how to comply with the duty of care. We currently have Codes for companion animals – dogs, cats, horses and non-human primates. We also have Codes for farm animals – cattle, sheep, pigs, laying hens, and others. The farm animal codes have been updated in the last few years but the dog, cat and equine codes have not been reviewed and updated since 2018.

Unlike Wales we do not have a Rabbit Welfare Code yet rabbits are a very popular pet with over 1m kept in households according to UK Petfood data. APGAW, alongside the key stakeholders, has produced a [Rabbit Welfare Code](#) which is being used in petshops, veterinary clinics and schools.

The codes do not create new laws but they can be helpful in setting out how to meet the legal “duty of care” to animals. They can be used as evidence if someone is charged with cruelty or neglect and they act as a public education tool. It would be helpful to review these Codes now and consider what we can add into encourage owners and keepers to deliver high standards of animal welfare.

Recommendation 10

A registration system to be introduced for breeding of puppies and kittens as part of a LAIAR review.

Impact Assessment

Moderate/High. This will require Parliamentary time for secondary legislation under Section 13 of the AWA 2006 but once agreed the local authorities have systems already in place to which they could add animal registration with minimal additional administration.

Recommendation 11

Support for the IHA tool and raising of public awareness and consideration of adding it into LAIAR 2018 when it is reviewed.

Impact Assessment

Low. The work as already been done and it supports the existing legal demands within LAIAR

Recommendation 12

More formalised relationships with NGOs and local authorities which could be developed through the National Companion Animal Welfare Panel

Impact Assessment

Low. It would only involve DEFRA engaging with the Board by sending representation and directing the work on better relationships and opportunities as well as endorsing the work as appropriate.

Recommendation 13

Review and update the Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs, Cats and Horse, Ponies, Donkeys, and their Hybrids. Consider making the APGAW Code of Practice for Rabbits statutory.

Impact Assessment

Moderate: The sector groups would be willing to undertake this work and deliver a draft to DEFRA for consideration.



Stage 4: Strong Partnerships

FACT Creating a model that utilises outside resources better is crucial to deliver improved preventative and enforcement measures.

As aforementioned, organisations like World Horse Welfare, Battersea, Dogs Trust, Cats Protection, Blue Cross and many other smaller charities, offer useful services for local authorities that can support pet owners and pet businesses in their areas. How the charities and local government could work together is a key part of partnership working but that is largely focused on prevention.

Alongside this, for companion animals, a great deal rides on LAIAR and links with business. LAIAR provides an excellent basis for improving animal welfare from the earliest stages of breeding and selling to boarding and exhibiting. It can help to tackle the welfare problems caused by lack of knowledge and understanding and can drive public awareness. Wider legislation such as microchipping and stray dogs, all play their role in improving welfare. This work is largely focused on compliance with regulations, often business facing or general owner/keeper matters, rather than wider cruelty and neglect.

For farmed animals, the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 and Animal Health Act 1981 give specific enforcement responsibilities to local authorities and the Animal Plant Health Agency (APHA). Local authorities are expected to investigate welfare complaints involving farm animals where suffering or poor welfare is alleged and support disease control measures (e.g., movement restrictions, animal by-product enforcement). Additionally, although the UK left the EU, Regulation 2017/625 was retained in UK law as part of the Official Controls (Animals, Feed and Food, Plant Health etc.) Regulations 2019 (SI 2019/148) and later amended by the Official Controls (Animals, Feed and Food,

Plant Health etc.) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020. For animal welfare, this requires inspections and enforcement under welfare legislation (e.g., the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007) to be done within the OCR framework which means they need to be officially authorised, risk-based, and subject to reporting requirements. Competent authorities include the APHA who lead on many on-farm welfare inspections and local authorities. It also includes local authorities and local trading standards officers play a key complementary role to APHA, particularly in areas where local enforcement or public interface is essential.

Competent authorities therefore have a clear duty in relation to farm animal welfare. Where enforcement then fails is the simple lack of sufficient resource and integration of enforcers and data which could result in a better risk-based approach with high quality reporting. This was mentioned under Section 1 “Making better animal welfare pay – better integration and data sharing.” The Animal Law Foundation, The Enforcement Problem 2022 and 2023 data has previously shown only 2-3% of farms are inspected each year and even for farms where there has been a concern raised, just half (50.45%) of farms were then inspected. Within this report, recommendations have been set out that are aimed at improving animal welfare enforcement broadly, however the next stage of APGAW’s work will be focused on how competent authorities can better meet the requirements set out under legislation for farm animals.

Companion animal cruelty and neglect can be even more problematic as many local authorities just will not have the resources to tackle cases and, unlike farm animals, they do not have a

direct duty to proactively pick up these issues. The wording under Section 30 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 states “A local authority in England or Wales **may** prosecute proceedings for any offence under this Act.” Police are also restricted in the amount of resources they can give to tackling animal cruelty and abuse.

Outside expertise

APGAW has identified both in the Part 1 report and within this report, that enforcement by local authorities is patchy. In some areas, it is done well and in other areas it is very low priority and little resource is put into it. The aim should be consistency and animal welfare cruelty and neglect must be tackled in every part of the country. The challenge is how to deliver this when it is unlikely there will be new funding and local authorities continue to face other demands.

The Animal Health Act Section 59 sets out that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (or the appropriate devolved minister), has the power to intervene if a local authority is not properly enforcing the Animal Health Act. Whilst there is no similar provision for animal welfare, APGAW takes the view that local authorities that do not have the skills, resource or will to enforce animal welfare should be directed to seek support from those that do. In our first report we suggested that such local authorities contract out their LAIAR duties to a more experienced body and there are several examples of where this has occurred. We believe there is scope to do more like this and we refer back to the requirement to use qualified and dedicated animal welfare officers.

The RSPCA Inspectorate has picked up a significant proportion of the role of seizure and prosecution, although it has not had the powers to act alone. There has been debate over the role of the RSPCA including through an EFRA Select Committee inquiry in 2015 which led to many

changes in the way the charity ran. APGAW is partly funded by the charity alongside other sources of funding and has been very clear in the role the RSPCA has played in supporting the APPG’s work. We have sought to consider the role of the inspectorate separately from that of the RSPCA’s public affairs team and wider corporate functions.

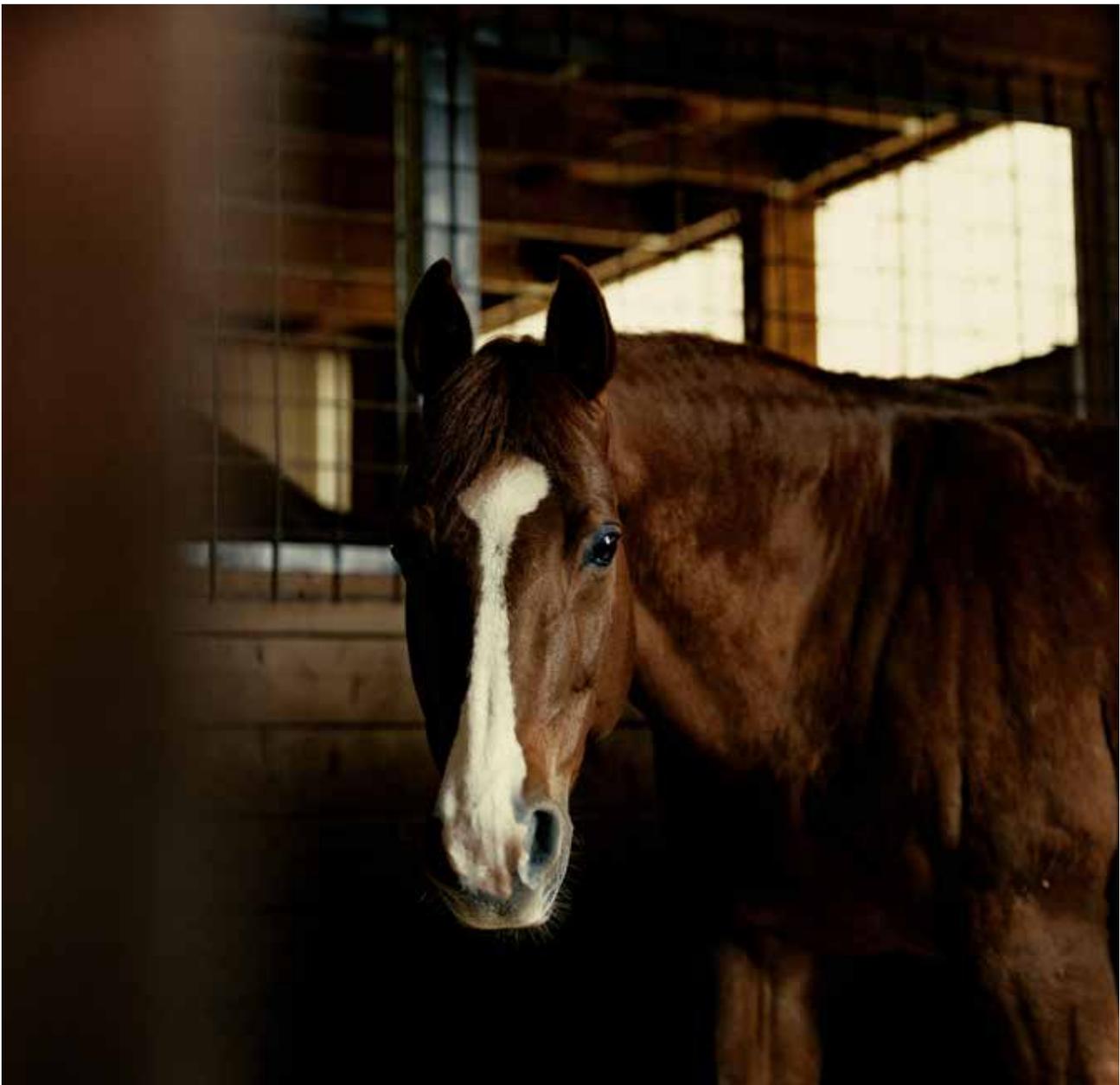
We recognise there are some elements of concern over RSPCA powers, but we have also seen that the public want to see the RSPCA dealing robustly with animal neglect and cruelty and there needs to be some consideration of how we utilise the RSPCA’s skills and resource whilst ensuring accountability and transparency. Some MPs and campaigners have argued there is a conflict because the RSPCA both campaigns on animal welfare law and prosecutes cases. In 2020, the RSPCA agreed to hand over its prosecutory role to the CPS to separate out investigations and prosecutions. Negotiations are still ongoing to realise this intention. They also set up an Independent Complaints Reviewer and have an independent prosecutions oversight panel. They have updated their complaints procedure so that any concerns in relation to the inspectors’ work can be reported directly to them via their website and reviewed by the relevant teams.

APGAW remains of the view that there needs to be direct accountability for animal welfare enforcement and that should sit with the competent authorities such as the local authority. There could, however, be scope to consider how local authorities could use organisations who have the necessary skillset like the RSPCA inspectorate or others to help with some parts of enforcement.

For example, RSPCA inspectors do not have statutory powers. The inspectors have often been criticised by the public as that restriction has meant animals cannot be rescued from situations where their welfare is poor or, contrary to the

provisions in the Animal Welfare Act 2006, until an external warrant has been obtained reliant on support from the police and local authorities. Some may say that is a good thing as it means the RSCPA cannot wrongfully take an animal in a case where they may be seen to have overstepped the mark but other nations have shown there is a better way forward which utilises their expertise, reduces the workload on public services and cuts the time that animals endure poor welfare.

There may be scope to develop the role of RSPCA inspectors to better support the delivery of effective animal welfare enforcement if accountability is clear and held by an officer in the competent authority. By being able to reach at-risk animals quicker, the RSPCA would be in a better position to collect and share any relevant information and/or evidence, potentially under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which could assist local authority officers with cases going forward. The accountable officer should also



have to report upwards on enforcement work and action. This would provide much better transparency and scrutiny.

Statutory powers are given to equivalent inspectors in the Netherlands, Scotland, Ireland and certain states in the USA. In Scotland, the SSPCA's inspectors are individually made inspectors under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 and have been able to seize animals and enter outbuildings for the past 18 years. This has been successful in Scotland and there are no thoughts of a different model as it is working. It is the case that England is significantly larger than Scotland and Northern Ireland and that is why accountability should be with local authorities rather than national Government.

Another example where powers could be given is that currently RSPCA inspectors can issue their own notices to animal owners in terms of how to make welfare improvements in cases where the animal is not in immediate danger but is at risk. In England, the RSPCA could be given powers under S10: serving statutory welfare notices which enables them to serve statutory notices and report back to the relevant local authority. This would improve the welfare of the animals in question by acting as both an incentive and deterrent.

The most significant priority must be ending the suffering of an animal as quickly as possible. They could be consideration of powers under Section 18: in relation to an animal in distress. This would enable inspectors to take steps to immediately alleviate an animal's suffering by taking them into RSPCA possession where relevant or in the worst-case scenarios, through euthanasia. At present the RSPCA is reliant on the permission and cooperation of the owner/s or the support of other agencies such as local authorities and police to fulfil Section 18, even in the worst cases of animal cruelty and neglect and this can cause serious delays. Any animal investigated by the RSPCA could be in immediate danger of dying or enduring further suffering unless removed from a situation,

therefore any reduction in the time taken to achieve this would improve animal welfare.

In June 2024 and 2025 the RSPCA were given temporary statutory powers by Westmorland and Furness Council for a two-week period to work alongside other officials at the Appleby Horse Fair. This resulted in several horses and dogs being seized using these powers. The key to it working was the partnership between the local authority and the RSPCA inspectors and this is vital as without that partnership there is a risk that accountability is lost. The local authority agreed the trial was successful and will be looking to repeat this at the 2026 Appleby horse fair.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 (AWA) provides the legal basis for over 95 percent of animal cruelty convictions secured by the RSPCA in Wales and England, and under this legislation inspectors could be granted enforcement powers via secondary/subordinate legislation. Ministers have the powers to make appointments under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and they could be specific in limiting power to specific functions that mirror certain sections of the AWA, such as those cases involving domestic companion animals.

There are concerns over a charity having powers, however, controls can be put in place to avoid any disproportionate use or overreach of giving more formal legal powers through ensuring accountability ultimately lies with the local authority. What we are trying to address is the lack of resource and focus in some areas which means many animals may suffer as well as many members of the public being very upset and frustrated by the RSPCA being unable to act to remove a clearly suffering animal. We would like to see, for example, a national animal welfare enforcement unit set up and funded by the Government, but this is unlikely in the current environment and therefore we are striving to develop a collaborative, joined up approach that utilises all the resources we have available.

The ongoing discussion from this could be around how accountability sits with the competent authority, how MoUs and partnerships could be developed in a way that provides that oversight without leading to delays and what procedures could be put in place that enable a person who has had their animal seized to seek an appeal or clarification. We urge debate on the idea of how we ensure the RSPCA, and indeed other relevant organisations delivering active enforcement, fit into the future enforcement vision.

Making Section 10 notices a direct enforcement tool

Improvement Notices are a valuable tool that should work to protect animal welfare with immediate effect upon being issued. The Animal Welfare Act 2006, however, does not itself within section 10 state that failure to comply with an Improvement Notice is an offence. The section focuses on providing a window where s9(1) offence proceedings are suspended (for that issue) and allows the person to avoid prosecution if they comply in time. While the notice period runs, you cannot be prosecuted under s.9 for that failure. There is no explicit penalty in the Act for simply ignoring the notice.

In short: it is a preventive opportunity, not a direct enforcement tool.

In comparison the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 use “Care Notices” and in this case an inspector can issue a Care Notice if they believe welfare needs are not being met. The notice states what must be done, and within what time. Unlike England, failure to comply with a Care Notice is itself an offence under Section 30(1) If convicted, the sentence can be up to 6 months’ imprisonment and/or a fine (Level 5 on the standard scale). Most importantly, the inspector or local authority may also take direct action to care for or remove animals under sections 32–34 if the notice is ignored or welfare deteriorates.

Scotland’s framework combines:

- A preventive mechanism (the Care Notice gives a chance to fix the problem);
- A coercive mechanism (failing to comply is an offence); and
- Protective powers (inspectors can intervene to remove animals).

England should enable the same powers to Improvement Notices and therefore give local authority inspectors a more robust and useful tool with which to both achieve quicker outcomes for animals and ensure the person who is subjected to such a notice recognises that they must comply or face immediate action from the competent authority.

The police – less resource, more engagement

Police activity around animal welfare is in dealing with animal cruelty and abuse and, often, a lot of their efforts are around protecting wildlife from illegal poaching and hunting. As aforementioned, police resource is limited and needs to be focused on dealing with the crimes that put people at risk such as child abuse, drug dealing, domestic violence and fraud. We understand we cannot demand they find additional resource for animal welfare alone.

Nonetheless, there is compelling evidence that many animal welfare issues including the dealing in low welfare puppies is linked to bigger criminal activity and that animal cruelty cases do have links to human abuse too. The LINKS project provides more detailed analysis of these links, for example, a 2018 UK review using NSPCC and RSPCA data found that up to 60% of families under investigation for child abuse also had incidents of animal abuse. The Panorama document “Dogs, Dealers and Organised Crime” emphasised that breeding illegal or extreme dogs has become “commodity trade” for some criminals.

There is a strong reason for the police to want to see better animal welfare enforcement and to work with the key stakeholders.

Raising the profile of enforcement within local authorities, setting clear accountability and giving them a toolkit such as limited powers to the RSPCA to help them, could then relieve pressure on the police as they would not need to attend with the RSPCA inspectors to remove a suffering animal and we could start to see animal welfare cases dealt with at an earlier stage. Every activity undertaken, whether by police or local authority, is at public cost. We need to recognise that without an effective enforcement regime that provides that toolkit and preventative approach, we then take a firefighting approach which costs more in the long-run. Having police involvement means things have gone very wrong and an animal has suffered.

It is clear that the police need to enforce the law and should address issues around animal abuse and cruelty however the police need to be best utilised to tackle the most complex and large-scale problems. We would suggest police involvement in the National Companion Animal Welfare Panel is critical and helpful to all authorities and that engagement would further help to set out the role police play in enforcement in a resource effective manner.

Recommendation 14

Work be undertaken to look at whether Ministers could utilise the powers under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to give limited power to the RSPCA inspectorate for specific functions with local authority support.

Impact Assessment

Moderate. This could be done through a working group of key parties – DEFRA, local government, RSPCA inspectorate and legal experts before an outline position is presented to the Minister.

Recommendation 15

Make Section 10 notices a direct enforcement tool by setting out under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 that failure to comply with an improvement notice is an offence using the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 “Care Notices” model as the basis for this amendment.

Impact Assessment

High: We recognise that finding the Parliamentary time to update the AWA2006 is challenging and also that in doing so it is likely there will be many other amendments put forward that will take resource, however we consider reviewing and updating the AWA2006 to be probably the most significant piece of work this Government can do to meet its commitment to deliver the highest standards of animal welfare and also one which is long overdue considering the Act is now 20 years old.

Recommendation 16

Support regional police representation on the National Companion Animal Welfare Panel

Impact Assessment

Low. We are suggesting taking pressure off the police but asking them to engage regionally and on the Panel with representatives sent for mainly online and occasional in person meetings.

Summary & Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Guidance from DEFRA to the existing and new unitary authorities on managing animal health and welfare responsibilities including participating in regional groups. Clarification through the Animal Welfare Act 2006 of the need to have dedicated and appropriately trained animal welfare officers.

Recommendation 2

Work with local authority leads to develop a Code of Practice on Animal Welfare Enforcement.

Recommendation 3

Tweak the statutory guidance to local authority inspectors on training, outline curriculum and approve appropriate courses with a practical element.

Recommendation 4

DEFRA to support the sector development of the National Companion Animal Welfare Panel and request that local authorities all connect into a regional group.

Recommendation 5

Support regional organisation and input into the National Companion Animal Welfare Panel and the use of benchmarking on fee setting and transparency over true costs.

Recommendation 6

Issue best practice for local authorities on working with social services and family support teams with clear mechanisms and cross reporting agreements.

Recommendation 7

Develop the model to reduce seizure time of animals taken in by the local authority.

Recommendation 8

The introduction of a single point of search for records held across all microchip databases is needed. A requirement for dog breeder information to remain as a permanently accessible part of the microchip record for enforcement purpose and additional powers for local authorities to issue Fixed Penalty Notices under the Animals (Penalty Notices) Act 2022 for non-compliance with microchipping regulations for dogs and cats.

Recommendation 9

Consider shared information and data IT systems for animal welfare to enable better risk-based approaches.

Recommendation 10

A registration system to be introduced for breeding of puppies and kittens as part of a LAIAR review.

Recommendation 11

Support for the IHA tool and raising of public awareness and consideration of adding it into LAIAR 2018 when it is reviewed.

Recommendation 12

More formalised relationships with NGOs and local authorities developed through the National Companion Animal Welfare Panel.

Recommendation 13

Review and update the Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs, Cats and Horse, Ponies, Donkeys, and their Hybrids. Consider making the APGAW Code of Practice for Rabbits statutory.

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Recommendation 16

Support regional police representation on the National Companion Animal Welfare Panel

Summary

The recommendations have been selected to be deliverable under the current framework. The APPG has heard suggestions from stakeholders around a Government led national enforcement team being set up to take away the requirements placed on local authorities and other bodies. There have been other ideas put forward all of which have merit. This plan, however, focuses on utilising existing tools and resources more effectively to make swift improvements to our enforcement capabilities.

To really deliver the highest levels of animal welfare since the 2006 Act, this Government should get both tough on both animal welfare cruelty and neglect whilst also finding the opportunities to educate and support pet businesses and pet owners to set the pathway to less need for enforcement. This is achievable and practicable if we all come behind co-delivery of a plan with the animal welfare sector and contribution of wider resources than that within Government.

There is a significant amount of tidying up that can be done to existing legislation that could improve animal welfare and deliver better enforcement. As it stands, there are several pieces

of legislation that are not fully effective including Licensing of Activities Involving Animals, Lucy’s Law, and Microchipping.

We would suggest the easiest recommendations are to support the formation of the National Companion Animal Welfare Panel and to seek to take forward the recommendations that are collaborative and can utilise the skills and resources of stakeholders. Collaboration could see the drafting of guidance on better practice as identified in this report and also the sharing of resources more effectively which will form the basis of delivering the other stages. It also seems high priority to review the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals Regulations owing to the scope they have to be improved but also the impact on the public and businesses from the glitches currently in them. Review of LAIAR offers the opportunity to look at the registration model and the Innate Health Assessment too as well as tidy up the training requirement.

There are some things only the Government can do and often outside stakeholders are not realistic on what can be achieved within the Government’s set agenda and objectives. But in many aspects,

the Government will not deliver on its ambition and will not be able to make the big changes needed without trust and help from those outside stakeholders and animal welfare is an issue in which co-delivery can be tested. When LAIAR was initially drafted, DEFRA set up an Expert Panel to assist them with the work and we would suggest this model can be effective and should be replicated for an Animal Welfare Enforcement Expert Panel. It needs to consist of a small core group of Local Authority representation, police, RSPCA and DEFRA and then bring in wider experts as needed.

Animal welfare may not seem a top priority considering economic and social challenges;

however, we know it reflects on the state of our society broadly and touches on wider issues such as biosecurity and serious criminal activity. None of the other political parties would disagree with the need to improve animal welfare enforcement because the public supports it. APGAW considers this work to be widely supported cross-party. The Government has much to gain in delivering the biggest impact for animal welfare since their last Act in 2006 by improving enforcement and demonstrating their commitment to social justice.

APGAW stands ready to support and assist the Ministers in DEFRA as a cross-party group.



Acknowledgements

APGAW would like to thank the Local Government Animal Welfare Group for their advice and input into this work. Thank you to the APGAW associate members who have provided evidence and ideas around improving enforcement. Thank you also to Vanessa Barnes for supporting the work.

We have spoken to a wide number of people working in local government and within the police during our research who would be too lengthy to name individually but we would really like to thank those people for their genuine willingness to improve the enforcement mechanism for animal welfare and for taking the time to meet and provide us with their valuable input.

Report Author: Marisa Heath. Please contact admin@apgaw.org if you could like to provide further information or ideas around this work.



