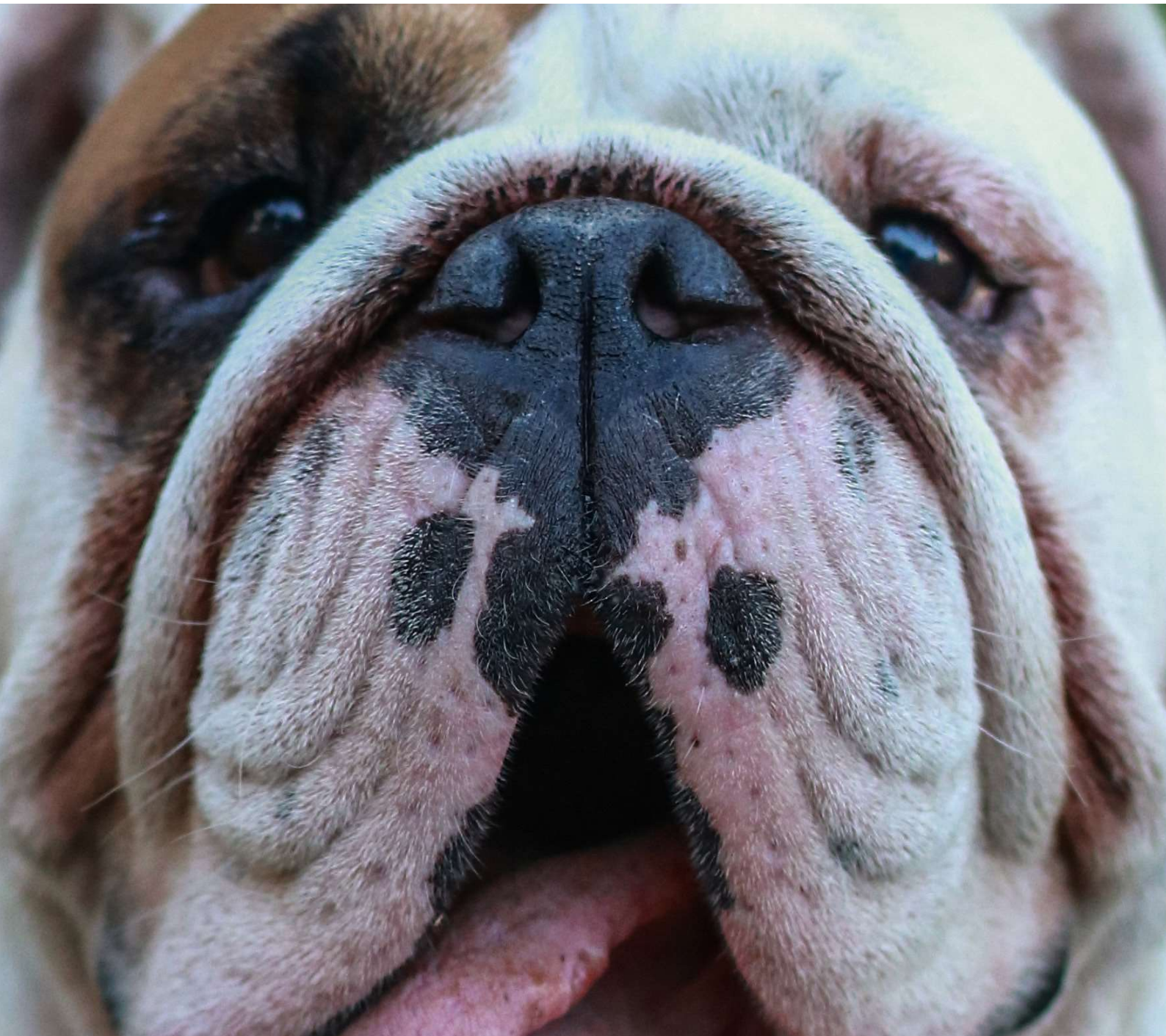


Protecting dogs from genetic and conformational suffering

Are we using the legal rules effectively?

May 2026



Protecting dogs from genetic and conformational suffering: Are we using the legal rules effectively?

An evaluation of how local authorities in England and Scotland assess dog breeders' compliance with schedule 6, paragraph 6(5) and schedule 6, paragraph 8(5) of the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) Regulations ("LAIAR")

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Executive summary

Dog breeders in England and Scotland who operate above a specified threshold must be licensed by their local authority and comply with licence conditions set out in each nation's respective version of the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) Regulations ("LAIAR").

Among these licence conditions are provisions intended to prevent harmful breeding decisions. In England, schedule 6, paragraph 6(5) LAIAR requires that no dog may be kept for breeding where it can reasonably be expected that breeding from that dog would have a detrimental effect on the health or welfare of the dog or their offspring, taking into account factors such as their genotype,¹ phenotype² and general state of health. Scotland introduced an equivalent provision via schedule 6, paragraph 8(5) of its 2021 LAIAR Regulations, which additionally takes behaviour into consideration.

These licence conditions are designed to safeguard the welfare of adult dogs and future puppies by preventing the breeding of animals whose genetic makeup, physical characteristics (e.g. very short muzzles, very short legs or extreme skin folds), behaviour or general health status may result in harm. However, concerns have been raised within the animal welfare sector about whether these conditions are being fully utilised by local authorities (the regulator for licensed dog breeding) and whether they are being applied consistently in practice.

This report examines how local authorities in England and Scotland³ are assessing compliance

1 The genetic constitution of an individual organism. (Oxford English Dictionary)

2 The set of observable characteristics of an individual resulting from the interaction of its genotype with the environment. (Oxford English Dictionary)

3 No equivalent condition exists in dog breeding

with these conditions and responding to potential breaches. It is based on responses to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests submitted in August 2025 to 326 local authorities across both nations.

Key findings

The FOI responses indicate that there were approximately 2,390 licensed dog breeders across England and Scotland in the second half of 2025 (2,217 in England and 173 in Scotland). Local authorities reported using a range of approaches when assessing compliance with the conditions:

- Around 60% indicated they rely on veterinary advice during inspections, typically through the involvement of a veterinarian who accompanies a licensing officer during inspections.
- Other reported approaches include:
 - reviewing veterinary records held by the applicant / operator,
 - examining breeders' records,
 - looking for evidence of health testing,
 - consulting external information sources, such as the Royal Kennel Club,
 - drawing on the experience and assessment of licensing officers.
- Some authorities also reported assessing breeders' knowledge, reviewing policies and procedures, and/or examining dogs' temperaments through their own interactions with dogs or by assessing other available information.
- Some local authorities described relatively comprehensive assessments that drew on multiple approaches, while others gave only broad descriptions of how they evaluate compliance.
- A proportion of responses did not identify any clear method of assessing compliance.

legislation in Wales or Northern Ireland at the time of writing.

The data also indicates that recorded findings of non-compliance are relatively rare, but it is encouraging to see that some councils in England have taken action where breaches have been found. The data showed that:

- In England, local authorities reported 31 instances of non-compliance with schedule 6, paragraph 6(5) between October 2018 and August 2025. These cases resulted in 17 licence refusals, six variations, two suspensions, two prosecutions and two convictions, with no reported licence revocations.
- In Scotland, no instances of non-compliance with the equivalent schedule 6, paragraph 8(5) were reported between September 2021 and August 2025.

Cross-referencing responses across the different FOI questions suggests that the actual number of instances of non-compliance may be higher than the figures recorded suggest. In several instances, local authorities described situations where dogs were considered unsuitable for breeding but did not record these as instances of non-compliance. In other cases, breaches recorded under the relevant condition appeared to relate to other licence conditions.

Where grounds for non-compliance were provided, these most commonly related to inherited or genetic conditions, conformation-related health issues, failure to conduct appropriate health testing, or concerns about dogs' general health or temperament.

Key issues identified

The findings highlight several challenges in the current system:

- There appears to be significant variation in how local authorities interpret and apply these conditions, suggesting that clearer guidance and practical support for inspectors is needed to ensure they are applied consistently and fairly across both nations.
- The low number of recorded instances of

non-compliance (and the lack of any recorded non-compliance in Scotland) raises questions about whether the provisions are being fully utilised and understood.

- In some cases, local authorities reported simply excluding individual dogs of concern from a licence rather than treating the issue as non-compliance, potentially limiting the ability to monitor and address welfare issues.

Recommendations

Our findings suggest there is a need for:

- Clearer statutory guidance directed at both licensing authorities and breeders about these licence conditions.
- Greater emphasis on inspectors making an holistic assessment of compliance and drawing on multiple sources of information and approaches, rather than relying on one or two approaches.
- Improved training and support for licensing officers about the animal welfare aims and application of these licence conditions.
- Clearer guidance about the appointment, involvement and role of veterinarians in inspections.
- Further research in this area, including into 1. how local authorities respond to suspected non-compliance with these conditions, 2. how local authorities appoint, utilise and work with vets during inspections, 3. local authorities' use and interpretation of health testing results, and 4. the exact meaning and scope of each provision and possibilities for more substantive reform.

Aims

This report aims to support ongoing policy discussions and contribute to efforts by the UK's governments, local authorities, dog breeders, veterinary sector and the wider animal welfare sector to improve the health and welfare of dogs kept for breeding and their future offspring.