

2025 PAWPRINTS AWARDS: AWARDS CRITERIA

CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE, INSPIRING CHANGE

Welcome to the 2025 PawPrints Awards, the RSPCA's flagship scheme celebrating the people and organisations making a real difference for animals through local government and public services.

This document sets out the full Awards Criteria for the 2025 scheme, providing a clear framework for each category and award level. Whether you're delivering frontline services or driving policy reform, PawPrints is here to champion your efforts to protect, promote, and enhance animal welfare.

AWARD CATEGORIES OVERVIEW

CORE CATEGORIES

Open to local authorities and public sector organisations delivering services that directly impact animal welfare. The five categories are:

- [Stray Dog Services](#)
- [Licensing of Activities Involving Animals](#)
- [Housing and Animal Welfare](#)
- [Contingency/Emergency Planning](#)
- [Kennelling](#)

Each features Bronze, Silver, and Gold levels, recognising progress from meeting statutory requirements through to demonstrating best practice and innovation. Organisations achieving Gold in one category for five consecutive years earn the prestigious Platinum PawPrints Award.

New for 2025:

- **Gold Plus:** Awarded to organisations achieving Gold (or above) in four or more core categories
- **Platinum Plus:** Awarded to organisations achieving Platinum in four or more core categories

HERO CATEGORIES (NEW FOR 2025)

Celebrating individuals, teams, and organisations responding to specific and emerging animal welfare challenges:

- **Care Act Hero**
- **Public Awareness Hero**
- **Mental Wellbeing Hero**
- **Fireworks Action Hero**
- **Responsible Ownership Hero**

SPECIAL AWARDS

Honouring exceptional contributions, innovation and leadership in animal welfare:

- **Special Recognition Award**
- **Innovator in Animal Welfare Award**
- **Massingham Advocacy Award**
- **Withnall Partnerships Award (New for 2025)**

ELIGIBILITY AND EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS

As of 2025, we require up-to-date evidence from all applicants, covering the financial year from April 2023 to April 2024. Unless stated otherwise, all criteria apply to organisations operating in England and Wales.

Supporting evidence is essential and should clearly demonstrate how your organisation meets or exceeds the criteria for each level. Guidance on what to include is provided throughout this document.

Explore the criteria, gather your evidence, and take pride in the work you're doing to make communities safer, kinder, and more compassionate for animals and the people who care for them.

CORE AWARDS CRITERIA

STRAY DOG SERVICES

This award celebrates local authorities excelling in stray dog services, with three levels of achievement: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. Each level reflects an increasing commitment to animal welfare, from meeting legal obligations to implementing innovative, preventative strategies.

LEVEL	CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	SUPPORTING EVIDENCE
BRONZE: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION Recognising authorities that meet statutory requirements and establish solid welfare practices.	COMPLIANCE WITH LEGISLATION	Meet statutory responsibilities for stray dog collection, kennelling and rehoming.	Policy documents; service contracts with third-party providers.
	DOG HANDLING TRAINING	Train all officers in ethical, reward-based handling methods.	Training records; course outlines; certificates.
	TREATMENT PROTOCOL	Document procedures for treating injured/sick strays, with contingency plans for emergencies.	Written protocols; case examples demonstrating the application.
	MICROCHIP SCANNING	Ensure all strays (including deceased dogs) are scanned and reunited with owners where possible.	Microchip identification logs; records of reunifications.
	FACILITY WELFARE STANDARDS	Maintain facilities adhering to the five welfare needs under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.	Inspection reports; audit results.
	BASIC RESPONSIBLE OWNERSHIP ADVICE	Provide reclaiming owners with advice on microchipping and preventing future straying.	Examples of leaflets, flyers, or website screenshots given to owners.
	COMPREHENSIVE RECORDS	Keep detailed records of strays, including outcomes and reasons for failed reunifications.	Example records of reports.
SILVER: RAISING THE BAR Awarded to authorities that go beyond the basics with improved welfare, proactive rehoming, and public engagement.	REHOMING POLICY	Develop a robust policy for rehoming stray dogs, including assessments and owner vetting. This includes any third-party organisations providing rehoming services on your behalf.	Rehoming policy document; case studies of successful rehoming.
	PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS	Run campaigns on microchipping, neutering, and welfare needs using council channels and events.	Campaign materials; social media screenshots; community event details.
	RESPONSIBLE RETURNS POLICY	Ensure reclaimed dogs are microchipped within 21 days; all rehomed dogs must also be microchipped.	Records of reclaimed and rehomed dogs with microchip details.
	ENHANCED WELFARE	Provide enrichment activities and advanced welfare monitoring for dogs	Enrichment schedules;

	STANDARDS	in care.	photography/videos of activities.
	PARTNERSHIPS FOR IMPROVEMENT	Collaborate with charities, rehoming centres, and veterinary services to improve outcomes.	Partnership agreements; examples of collaborative projects.
GOLD: LEADING THE WAY Reserved for authorities demonstrating excellence through early intervention and preventative measures to reduce strays.	OUT-OF-HOURS SERVICE	Provide adequate and accessible out-of-hours services for stray dog collection or drop-off.	Service schedules; staff rotas; and public-facing information.
	PROACTIVE CAMPAIGNS	Regularly run campaigns on topics like seasonal safety and responsible ownership.	Campaign calendars; materials; and feedback reports.
	DATA-DRIVEN PREVENTION	Use data to identify trends and target stray dog prevention measures.	Analysis reports; examples of data-driven interventions.
	INNOVATIVE PRACTICES	Implement creative solutions to improve services and animal welfare outcomes.	Examples of practices and their impact.
	ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION	Host workshops and events to educate the public on responsible pet care.	Event schedules; attendee lists; and feedback forms.
	EARLY INTERVENTION STRATEGIES	Address root causes of stray dogs through outreach and affordable services (e.g., neutering).	Programme details; participation rates; and outcome reports.
	LEADERSHIP AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING	Share success stories and best practices with colleagues and other councils.	Publications; presentations; and case studies shared with stakeholders.

ANIMAL ACTIVITY LICENSING

This award celebrates local authorities excelling in animal activity licensing, with three levels of achievement: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. Each level reflects an increasing commitment to enhancing animal welfare, from meeting minimum legal obligations to implementing early intervention and preventative strategies.

LEVEL	CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	SUPPORTING EVIDENCE
BRONZE: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION Recognising authorities that meet statutory requirements	POLICY AND PROCEDURES	Clear, documented process for licensing animal activities, meeting statutory requirements.	Written policy and procedural documents.
	COMPLAINT HANDLING	Procedures for addressing public complaints related to licensed activities.	Relevant section of written policy or procedural document.

and establish solid welfare practices.	INSPECTION MANAGEMENT	Ensure timely inspections by qualified officers (and experts where necessary).	Relevant section of procedural document, including roles of those attending inspections.
	EXPERT CONSULTATION	Maintain a list of qualified experts (e.g. ABTC-registered behaviourists, vets) to assist officers.	A copy of the list of experts or organisations available for consultation.
	PRIMATE POLICY (ENGLAND ONLY)	Adopt a policy recommending against keeping or selling primates as companion animals. The policy should outline how the local authority will support current owners to meet zoo licensing standards, rehome captive primates to suitably licensed zoos or sanctuaries, and contingency plans for abandonment cases in preparation for the new legislation being introduced in April 2026.	Relevant section of written policy.
	OFFICER TRAINING (WALES ONLY)	Licensing officers must complete training for Welsh regulations and best practices.	Certificates of completion of bookings for training courses; evidence of participation in Welsh projects.
SILVER: RAISING THE BAR Awarded to authorities that go beyond the basics with improved welfare, transparency and public engagement.	WELFARE PROMOTION	Promote microchipping, neutering, responsible pet ownership, and the five welfare needs.	Links to council website pages or examples of campaigns/events.
	SPECIALISED TRAINING	Provide additional training for licensing officers on animal welfare and behaviour.	Records of completed or planned training sessions.
	ENHANCED WELFARE STANDARDS	Inspections should assess enrichment and welfare needs beyond statutory minimums.	Inspection reports or case examples demonstrating enhanced welfare practices.
	TRANSPARENCY OF ESTABLISHMENTS	Publish a list of licensed establishments and ratings to improve accountability.	Link to council website page listing licensed establishments.
	PROACTIVE COMPLAINT RESOLUTION	Ensure timely follow-up and resolution of welfare concerns raised through complaints.	Complaint records and resolution reports.
GOLD: LEADING THE WAY Reserved for authorities demonstrating excellence through	EARLY INTERVENTION WITH VENDORS	Create protocols ensuring vendors verify customers can meet animals' welfare needs.	Copies of guidance provided to vendors; case examples.
	PROSECUTION PROTOCOL	Clear processes for pursuing legal actions against non-compliance.	Relevant sections of policy; examples of prosecutions or enforcement actions taken.

early intervention, prevention and innovation.	UNLICENSED ACTIVITY MONITORING	Proactively identify and address unlicensed activities, focusing on compliance.	Evidence of proactive monitoring; examples of licensing or enforcement activities.
	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	Host workshops or events with local partners to educate the public on responsible ownership and the importance of using only appropriately licensed and regulated establishments (e.g. for boarding, breeding, or selling animals).	Event schedules; attendee lists; and feedback forms.
	LEADERSHIP AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING	Share success stories and best practices with colleagues and other councils.	Publications, presentations, and case studies shared with stakeholders.

HOUSING

This award celebrates local authorities excelling in pet-friendly housing policies and welfare support, with three levels of achievement: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. Each level reflects an increasing commitment to responsible pet ownership, from meeting legal obligations to implementing innovative, preventative strategies.

LEVEL	CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	SUPPORTING EVIDENCE
BRONZE: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION Recognising authorities that establish clear, positive pet-friendly policies and support networks.	PET-FRIENDLY HOUSING POLICY	A clear and positive policy for all housing under the local authority's control or influence, covering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case-by-case flexibility for pet ownership, ensuring welfare needs are met. • Defined responsibilities of pet owners, permissible species/quantities, and promotion of responsible ownership. • Transparent procedures for managing complaints about nuisance, welfare, or cruelty concerns. • Prohibition of commercial breeding and vending of animals, while discouraging non-commercial breeding. 	Relevant sections of written policy and procedural documents.
	WELFARE PARTNERSHIPS	Maintain a compiled list of local, reputable animal welfare and veterinary organisations, including details of reduced-cost or free veterinary services.	Copy of the list or a link to where it can be found.
	CARE ACT PREPAREDNESS	Acknowledge responsibilities under the Care Act 2014 (and equivalent in Wales) by signposting support services for vulnerable tenants who may struggle to care for their pets due to illness or changing circumstances.	Examples of signposting materials or references in tenant handbooks or online resources.
SILVER: RAISING THE BAR	ADVICE & SUPPORT	Provide written pet care guidance from reputable animal welfare sources upon pet registration, actively promoting permanent identification and	Examples of advice and information given to residents.

Awarded to authorities that go beyond the basics by providing additional welfare resources, responsible pet ownership initiatives, and proportionate enforcement policies.		neutering.	
	REGISTRATION & RECORDS	Maintain an up-to-date register of animals kept within each dwelling, ensuring accurate records of pet ownership.	Example record (a blank template is acceptable).
	DANGEROUS DOGS ACT COMPLIANCE	Apply a proportionate response to prohibited types of dogs, allowing legally owned dogs on the Index of Exempted Dogs (IED) to be kept in properties, provided exemption conditions are met.	Relevant section of written policy and procedural document.
	CARE ACT PREPAREDNESS GUIDANCE	Provide basic advice and guidance to residents - particularly those who are elderly or vulnerable - on making plans for their pets in case they are no longer able to care for them, including temporary care options and links to relevant support services.	Examples of guidance materials, referral forms, or staff training content.
GOLD: LEADING THE WAY Reserved for authorities demonstrating excellence through early intervention, welfare-focused initiatives, and proactive support for pet owners in housing.	TEMPORARY & EMERGENCY HOUSING	Allow provisions for pet ownership in temporary or emergency housing to prevent unnecessary pet relinquishment.	Relevant section of written policy and procedural document.
	CARE ACT PREPAREDNESS AND SUPPORT	Provide tailored advice and support to residents - particularly those who are elderly, disabled, or otherwise vulnerable - on planning for their pets' care in the event of illness, hospitalisation, or a move into supported living.	Examples may include guidance materials, referral processes, or evidence of multi-agency collaboration.
	MICROCHIP & NEUTERING PROVISIONS	Offer discounted microchipping and neutering services to prevent unwanted breeding and encourage responsible pet ownership.	Examples of this work, including when last carried out.
	ADVICE & SUPPORT EXPANSION	Establish a formal partnership with a reputable animal welfare organisation to provide residents with pet care advice upon request or via regular (monthly or quarterly) visits.	Examples of this work and records of the last session carried out.

CONTINGENCY PLANNING

This award celebrates local authorities excelling in contingency planning for animal welfare in emergencies, with three levels of achievement: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. Each level reflects an increasing commitment to preparedness, response, and proactive risk mitigation.

LEVEL	CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	SUPPORTING EVIDENCE
BRONZE: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION Recognising	ANIMAL SHELTERS	Identify locations for temporary animal shelters and establish a pet evacuation plan.	Relevant section of written policy and procedural document, including shelter details.

authorities that meet statutory requirements and establish essential contingency planning for animal welfare.	PREPAREDNESS INFORMATION	Provide online resources to help pet owners prepare for emergencies.	Link to preparedness information on the council website or external resource.
	CONTACTS & PARTNERSHIP	Maintain a list of reputable animal welfare organisations and local vets who can assist in emergencies, with established communication.	Copy of contact list or link to where it is available, including details of support provided.
	ANIMAL WELFARE INCLUSION	Ensure companion animal welfare is explicitly included in written contingency plans.	Relevant section of written policy and procedural documents.
SILVER: RAISING THE BAR Awarded to authorities that enhance preparedness through collaboration, support for external organisations, and regular contingency exercises.	NGO INVOLVEMENT	Engage reputable animal welfare organisations in contingency exercises and planning meetings.	Examples of meetings or exercises attended by relevant organisations.
	EXTERNAL SUPPORT	Provide guidance and support to establishments housing large numbers of animals in drawing up contingency plans.	Example(s) of guidance documents or other support offered.
	REGULAR EXERCISES	Run at least one tabletop exercise every two years that includes a companion animal welfare element.	Details and date of the exercise.
	ALLOTMENT HOLDER SUPPORT (IF APPLICABLE)	Offer emergency preparedness advice to allotment holders regarding the care of animals.	Example of advice given.
GOLD: LEADING THE WAY Reserved for authorities demonstrating excellence through proactive public engagement and awareness and live emergency exercises.	VARI-KENNEL ACCESS	Ensure ownership of, or access to, at least 50 kennel spaces or vari-kennels within the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) network for emergency use.	Details of ownership or access to kennel space.
	AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS	Conduct awareness campaigns or initiatives to educate pet owners on emergency preparedness.	Examples of work such as campaign materials, online resources, or event details.
	LIVE EXERCISE WITH COMPANION ANIMAL ELEMENT	Organise at least one live exercise every three years that includes a companion animal welfare element, ensuring flexibility in emergency response.	Details and date of the exercise.

KENNELLING

This award celebrates local authorities that ensure the highest welfare standards for dogs in kennels, with three levels of achievement: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. Each level reflects an increasing commitment to best practices, welfare enhancements, and proactive behavioural support.

Please note the evidence required to support entries in his category is set out in the documents below:

[General Points of Good Practice - MUST](#)
[General Points of Good Practice - SHOULD](#)

LEVEL	CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	SUPPORTING EVIDENCE
<p>BRONZE: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION</p> <p>Recognising authorities that meet statutory requirements and implement core welfare provisions.</p>	<p>COMPLIANCE WITH ANIMAL WELFARE ACT 2006</p>	<p>Ensure all kennelled dogs receive care that meets the provisions of Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, following the RSPCA guide to good practice.</p>	<p>Completed General Points of Good Practice – MUST checklist. Evidence of at least two "MUST" requirements per welfare need.</p>
<p>SILVER: RAISING THE BAR</p> <p>Awarded to authorities that go beyond minimum standards by implementing best practice and additional welfare measures.</p>	<p>BEST PRACTICE IMPLEMENTATION</p>	<p>Adhere to the highest welfare standards for kennelled dogs in accordance with the RSPCA guide to good practice.</p>	<p>Completed General Points of Good Practice – MUST & SHOULD checklist. Evidence of at least two "MUST" and "SHOULD" requirements per welfare need.</p>
	<p>CONTRACT/POLICY COMPLIANCE</p>	<p>Ensure contracts and policies reflect compliance with Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.</p>	<p>Copy of contract or policy document.</p>
	<p>PROVISIONS FOR PUPPIES</p>	<p>Implement additional provisions for the management of puppies, such as fostering or specialist agency partnerships.</p>	<p>Information detailing how puppies are managed, including foster arrangements or third-party partnerships.</p>
<p>GOLD: LEADING THE WAY</p> <p>Reserved for authorities demonstrating excellence through behavioural support, environmental enrichment, and welfare-focused initiatives.</p>	<p>BEHAVIOURAL SUPPORT</p>	<p>Establish a working relationship with a qualified behaviour expert (ideally ABTC registered) who makes regular kennel visits.</p>	<p>Documentation confirming the relationship, including visit frequency and expertise of the behaviour specialist.</p>
	<p>WELFARE-FOCUSED INITIATIVES</p>	<p>Implement initiatives that exclusively improve the welfare of kennelled dogs, such as enrichment programmes or reward-based training.</p>	<p>Details of initiatives, such as programme descriptions, enrichment schedules, and training provider information.</p>

HERO AWARDS CRITERIA

Celebrating public sector innovation in tackling specific animal welfare challenges.

CATEGORY	WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR	JUDGING CRITERIA & SCORING	EVIDENCE REQUIRED
CARE ACT HEROES	Initiatives supporting pet owners entering hospital or care, ensuring their animals are safeguarded while addressing legal and welfare concerns.	Need (20%) Effectiveness (30%) Collaboration (20%) Sustainability (20%) Innovation (10%)	1000-word statement (maximum) with case studies, supporting evidence, impact reports, testimonials, and relevant documentation.
PUBLIC AWARENESS HEROES	Public awareness campaigns that effectively educate and engage communities on critical animal welfare issues, such as dogs in hot cars/hot walks, pets as prizes, and wildlife protection.	Public Awareness (30%) Impact (25%) Effectiveness (20%) Innovation (15%) Collaboration (10%)	1000-word statement (maximum) detailing objectives, engagement, impact, stakeholder collaboration, and creative campaign materials (images, videos, media coverage).
MENTAL HEALTH AND WELFARE HEROES	Programmes that balance owner support with intervention to prevent animal hoarding while addressing the links between mental health and animal welfare.	Need (20%) Effectiveness (30%) Collaboration (20%) Impact (20%) Public Awareness (10%)	1000-word statement (maximum) with case studies, outcome reports, impact assessments, and supporting creative materials (images, videos, media coverage).
FIREWORKS ACTION HEROES	Local authorities or organisations working to reduce the impact of fireworks on animals through advocacy, policy change, and public awareness.	Policy Advocacy (30%) Public Awareness (30%) Collaboration (20%) Impact (10%) Innovation (10%)	1000-word statement (maximum) with public awareness campaign details, legislative advocacy efforts, impact assessments, and supporting creative materials (images, videos, media coverage).
RESPONSIBLE OWNERSHIP HEROES	Initiatives promoting responsible dog ownership, covering behaviour change, education, enforcement, public engagement, and community support.	Public Awareness (30%) Effectiveness (25%) Policy Advocacy (20%) Impact (15%) Sustainability (10%)	1000-word statement (maximum) outlining the initiative, case studies, impact evidence, relevant documentation, and supporting creative materials (images, videos, media coverage).

SPECIAL AWARDS CRITERIA

Honouring outstanding individuals, teams, and partnerships for their contribution to animal welfare.

CATEGORY	WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR	JUDGING CRITERIA & SCORING	EVIDENCE REQUIRED
SPECIAL RECOGNITION	Honouring individuals or teams making outstanding contributions to animal welfare.	Impact (40%) Commitment (30%) Collaboration (20%) Innovation (10%)	1000-word nomination statement (minimum) highlighting achievements, impact, collaboration, and innovation, with supporting materials (case studies, testimonials, media coverage).
INNOVATOR IN ANIMAL WELFARE	Recognising pioneering projects/initiatives improving animal welfare outcomes.	Innovation (40%) Impact (30%) Sustainability (20%) Collaboration (10%)	1000-word nomination statement (minimum) outlining the innovation, impact, sustainability, and collaboration, with

			supporting materials (case studies, testimonials, media coverage).
MASSINGHAM ADVOCACY	Celebrating elected representatives advancing animal welfare through policy and public engagement.	Impact (40%) Policy Advocacy (30%) Public Awareness (20%) Innovation (10%)	1000-word nomination statement (minimum) detailing policy advocacy efforts, public engagement, and impact, with supporting materials (legislative records, testimonials, media coverage).
WITHNALL PARTNERSHIPS	Recognising outstanding collaboration between the RSPCA, local authorities, and other organisations.	Collaboration (40%) Impact (30%) Sustainability (20%) Innovation (10%)	1000-word nomination statement (minimum) showcasing the partnership's impact, sustainability, and innovation, with supporting materials (case studies, testimonials, media coverage).

JUDGING CRITERIA AND SCORING SYSTEM (HERO AND SPECIAL AWARD CATEGORIES)

All entries to the Hero Categories and Special Awards are assessed using a weighted scoring system, ensuring a consistent, fair, and transparent process across all submissions. Final decisions are made by a panel of industry experts and independent judges with extensive experience in public services and animal welfare.

SCORING OVERVIEW

- **Hero Categories:** Maximum score of 50 points
- **Special Awards:** Maximum score of 40 points

Each criterion is scored on a scale of 1 to 10, with scores weighted according to the category-specific breakdown.

Score	Description
1 - 3	Limited or no evidence provided
4 - 6	Some evidence, but lacks impact or detail
7 - 8	Strong submission with clear, demonstrable impact
9 - 10	Outstanding example with compelling evidence and measurable results

JUDGING CRITERIA

The judges may use any combination of the following criteria depending on the category:

- **Need** – Clear understanding of the issue and why action was necessary.
- **Effectiveness** – Demonstrable results and how well the initiative addressed the issue.
- **Collaboration** – Partnerships that strengthened the initiative.
- **Sustainability** – Long-term planning and future viability.
- **Innovation** – Novel, creative or ground-breaking approaches.
- **Policy Advocacy** – Efforts to influence regulation or public policy.
- **Public Awareness** – Community engagement and education outcomes.
- **Commitment** – Dedication and consistent effort over time.
- **Impact** – Tangible improvements for animals, communities, or policy.