

PAWPRINTS AWARDS

KENNELING CRITERIA 2026 - SHOULD



GENERAL POINTS OF GOOD PRACTICE

Where the contract manager is not directly involved with the daily care of the dogs, they **should** ensure they maintain contact with whoever is directly involved.

Sufficient adequately trained staff **should** be available every day to ensure that the welfare needs of the dogs at the establishment are met.

1. ENVIRONMENT

Making sure dogs have a suitable place to live

1.2 Kennel design

Social Contact - Pair-and group-housing requires careful planning, appropriate kennel design and the identification of compatible individuals by trained and competent staff, so this type of housing may not always be possible. However, at a minimum, visual contact with other dogs (where this is appropriate for the individual dog, individual circumstances, and it's safe to do so) **should** be provided, so long as the guidance below is followed and dogs have a place where they can remain out of view when they choose. Kennels and seizing authorities may wish to consider pair- and group-housing for seized dogs from the same household where appropriate.

a) Many kennel designs are very barren. Sleeping platforms can increase kennel complexity and three-dimensional space as well as offering insulation from the cold and a vantage point – so where possible, a platform **should** be provided.

b) The design and layout of kennels **should** allow dogs to be able to control their visual access to their surroundings and dogs in other kennels, where this is appropriate for the individual dog, individual circumstances, and it is safe to do so. This can be achieved in two ways:

- i) in an open kennel, by having an area that the dog can move into to avoid visual contact with other dogs, and
- ii) in a visually restricted kennel, by having a raised area, e.g. a platform, to enable visual contact.

c) The layout of kennels **should** minimise the number of dogs that staff disturb when removing any one individual, and **should** also ensure the safety of staff when passing other dogs with a dog on a leash. For example, staff can minimise disturbance by choosing a route that passes the fewest dogs (see section 5.3f) or by placing reactive dogs in a kennel where few dogs need to go past.

d) Kennels **should** be designed and laid out in such a way as to reduce noise (see section 1.7, below).

g) Bedding of a suitable material, e.g. shredded paper or fleece material, must be provided. Chewing or destruction of bedding should not result in restricted access, rather alternative materials must be trialled. If it is found that a dog persistently chews or destroys bedding then advice **should** be sought from a suitably qualified behavioural expert (see Appendix III) or veterinary surgeon and an assessment made of how to resolve the problem. For example, consideration **should** be given to the aspects of the dog's environment that could be making it difficult for the dog to cope, and changes implemented where appropriate.

1.3 Kennel size

c) For all new builds, the minimum kennel size must be at least 4m² for dogs under 20kg, and 8m² for dogs over 20kg. This **should** be increased in relation to the size and number of dogs, so that both the length and width are sufficient for each and all the dogs to lie outstretched at all angles, with neither their tail nor snout touching the walls or another individual. Current constructions should be of this minimum size.

1.4 Lighting

a) As a general rule, the accommodation for kennelled dogs **should** give them access to indoor and outdoor areas. However, if there is no alternative and dogs have to be kennelled indoors, they **should** be provided with a light/dark cycle that corresponds to external day-and night-times; in addition, natural daylight **should** be provided where possible.

b) Indoor kennelling **should not** be seen as a long-term solution and dogs **must** be moved to more suitable accommodation as quickly as possible.

1.6 Ventilation/humidity

b) The ventilation system **should** be designed to minimise harmful draughts and noise disturbance.

1.7 Noise

b) If there is a lot of ambient noise then buildings or kennels **should** be sound-insulated. If there are likely to be high levels of internal noise, sound-absorbent materials **should** be incorporated into the kennel design.

c) Housing **should** be designed to avoid prolonged, loud or high frequency noises, such as those generated by audio-visual equipment, certain kinds of industrial machinery, and metal gates.

d) Soothing background music, e.g. classical music, can be beneficial (see Appendix III) and may be provided^{1*}, but loud music may be stressful and **should** be avoided.

1.8 Access to an outdoor area for exercise and interaction

a) All adult dogs and puppies over six weeks of age must have daily access to outdoor safe and secure areas, away from the kennel area and this **should** be for at least 30 minutes per day, whether this is lead exercise and/or in an exercise run and unless a vet indicates otherwise. This **should** be in addition to opportunities for toileting. Consideration **should** be given to the siting of the outdoor enclosure to ensure it is in a suitable position.

b) The presence of trained and competent staff and other dogs will encourage dogs to explore their surroundings, interact and play. Providing it is safe to do so, appropriate for the individual dog and individual circumstances, trained and competent staff and other dogs **should** be present when dogs have access to an outdoor area.

c) Equipment such as tunnels, platforms and toys (see Appendix II) **should** be provided as they encourage activity and exploration of the outdoor area.

1.9 Transport

b) Whenever dogs are transported they must be fit and healthy for the intended journey. Injured and/or diseased dogs must not be transported unless they are being taken to a veterinary surgery or under veterinary advice. The transporting of distressed dogs **should be** avoided whenever possible.

c) Dogs **should** be fed a small meal about two hours before a journey and exercised immediately before they are loaded to give them the opportunity to go to the toilet.

d) During a journey dogs must be securely and comfortably confined. If a dog is transported alone in a container, he or she must have enough space to stand, sit erect, lie in a natural position and turn around normally while standing up. If transported with other dogs, there **should** be sufficient space for all the dogs to carry out all these behaviours without touching other dogs. It is recognised that this might not always be possible in urgent or emergency situations.

e) If transporting dogs by road, there **should** be a break every two hours to offer water and the chance to go to the toilet. Breaks **should** be at least 30 minutes long to allow the water to be absorbed.

^{1*} The playing of copyright music or sound recordings, including playing the radio, in areas to which the public has access typically requires licences to be purchased from both of the following bodies: the Performing Rights Society (PRS) in respect of copyright in the lyrics and composition; and the Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL) in respect of copyright in the sound recording and performance.

2. DIET

Making sure dogs have a healthy diet

2.1 Food and water

b) All dogs must receive a palatable diet that fulfils their nutritional requirements and is matched to their age, breed, health, reproductive status, body condition score*, and weight and activity level. A veterinary surgeon **should** assist with devising an appropriate diet, and manufacturers' advice **should** be read and followed.

c) Wherever possible, changes to a dog's diet **should not** be made suddenly. Whenever possible, details of the seized dog's diet **should** be obtained at the point of seizure and any changes in type, quantity or frequency **should** be implemented gradually over several days. In the absence of information about a dog's diet, or where the current diet is deemed unsuitable, a bland diet **should** be introduced initially.

2.2 Feeding regime

a) Adult dogs must be fed at least once a day, unless advised otherwise by a veterinary surgeon. Consideration **should** be given to the feeding regime the dog has been used to in his or her previous home/accommodation.

b) Dogs **should** be fed at least two hours before transportation and **should not** be fed shortly before or after strenuous exercise.

d) If a dog's eating or drinking habits change, the dog **should** be closely monitored by trained and competent staff. A veterinary surgeon **must** be consulted if there is no improvement within 24 hours or if the animal's condition worsens.

f) To achieve e) above, kennels must have weighing scales available for staff to monitor the dogs' weight. Dogs **should** be weighed at least once a week, with the information recorded in a suitable place i.e. the individual dog's daily care sheet (see Appendix V for an example). A number of companies provide body condition score charts, which can be useful in assessing a dog's body condition.

g) For individually housed dogs, part or their entire food ration **should** be provided in an activity feeder. For example, where safe and appropriate to do so for individual dogs, a food-filled Kong can be provided just before staff leave at the end of the day and collected the following morning. During the day the Kongs can be cleaned and food prepared for refilling. It can also be beneficial to provide part of the food ration for pair- or group-housed dogs in this way, as long as dogs do not guard these.

^{2*} It is important that any Body Condition Scoring (BCS) system used is validated. The BCS systems developed by Purina and Waltham have been validated and are suitable to use.

3. BEHAVIOUR

Making sure dogs behave normally

3.1 Exercise

- a) Dogs must be provided with the opportunity to exercise away from their kennel at least once a day and this **should** be for a total of at least 30 minutes – unless veterinary advice suggests otherwise.
- b) In addition, where possible, daily opportunities for exercise **should** be provided with staff and other dogs so long as it is safe to do so (see section 1.8b also). The provision of safe and suitable enrichment items, such as tunnels, steps, ramps and toys **should** be considered for use in the off-lead exercise areas. See Appendix II.
- c) Additional opportunities, besides those during exercise, **should** be provided for toileting (see section 5.3e). This is particularly important for those dogs that won't urinate or defecate in their kennel area.
- d) The provision of exercise **should** follow a consistent daily pattern so that it is predictable to the dogs (see also section 5.3b).

3.2 Toy and food enrichment

- b) Safe, durable, chewable, food-flavoured or food-filled toys **should** be provided to each dog every day e.g. Kong toys – (see section 2.2g for an example of how to use them).
- c) Devices **should** be presented in such a way as to maintain interest and activity in the dogs. This can be achieved, for example, by changing toy types to increase novelty.

3.3 Monitoring of behavioural signs

- c) Where multiple dogs within an establishment show signs of stress, fear and anxiety e.g. exhibiting repetitive behaviours, the housing and husbandry routines of the establishment must be reviewed (see also section 1.1h). Advice from a veterinary surgeon and/or suitably qualified behaviour expert (see Appendix III) must be sought where necessary. If the kennel fails to adhere to the advice, the dogs **should** be removed to another kennel and the contract terminated.

3.4 Socialisation and habituation of puppies

3.4.1 Socialisation of puppies

- a) In addition to handling the puppies during regular husbandry procedures, staff must ensure that they are handled regularly on a daily basis from three weeks of age. The handling over the following weeks **should** be conducted by a variety of people of both sexes, of different ages and appearances, especially children, and be exposed to different environments.
- b) Where possible, puppies **should** be carefully introduced to children before they are returned home or rehomed.
- c) Where possible, at between six and eight weeks of age, puppies **should** be carefully introduced to vaccinated, healthy, calm adult dogs from outside their litter.
- d) Points a to c above are more practically achieved in a domestic setting, so wherever possible puppies **should** remain at home and an undertaking used (this is a set of conditions between the two parties outlining how the dogs should be kept). Alternatively, the puppies **should** be placed with suitable fosterers or a third-party agency^{3*} **should** be used.

3.4.2 Habituation

^{3*}For example, a reputable rehoming or animal welfare organisation.

b) From two weeks of age, puppies **should** be gently examined daily e.g. picked up, ears checked, feet handled, etc. This can be done within the handling specified above, and **should** happen before the puppy's first examination by a veterinary surgeon or before he/she is microchipped.

c) Adult dogs **should** be habituated to physical examination, general handling and grooming (see sections 3.1e and 4.2d for further information about fearful and aggressive dogs).

3.5 Handling, training and training devices

a) A suitable flat collar, harness or head collar **should** be used to walk dogs and they must be correctly fitted and used.

e) To prevent fear of new situations, and the possible formation of negative associations, any new situations **should** be introduced slowly and carefully.

Muzzles - Where possible, dogs which are to be returned to their owner or keeper and which are required to be muzzled in a public place **should** be muzzle trained (using positive reward-based methods) while held in kennels. For information on how to achieve this, see Appendix IV.

f) Equipment to catch and control dogs must be kept on site. For example, all kennels **should** have slip leads and dog graspers, with staff trained in their use. Kennels that house dogs seized under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 **should** also have some form of propellant-based distraction device, e.g. fire extinguisher for use in emergencies. However, to safeguard dog welfare and their own health and safety, staff must be trained and competent in how to use such equipment and in which circumstances it is appropriate to use it as well as recognise that some devices have the potential to escalate aggression. Where devices such as graspers and fire extinguishers are used, and in recognition that these have the potential to increase fear and anxiety, their use must be fully justified and all other options considered.

4. COMPANY

Making sure dogs have the company they need

4.1 Group or separate housing

a) Where it is practical and safe to do so, for example there are no biosecurity or health and safety concerns, dogs **should** be pair- or group-housed. For example, consideration must be given as to whether it is possible to house dogs seized from the same household in this way – see section 4.1f below.

c) Where dogs are housed separately it is important to ensure that their welfare is maximised. Where there are concerns about an individual dog's welfare, advice from a veterinary surgeon or suitably qualified behaviour expert (see Appendix III) **should** be sought to ensure optimal welfare. Any dog housed in isolation must be provided with alternative means of enrichment and social interaction (see sections 3.1, 3.2 and 4.2).

d) Where dogs can be pair- or group-housed, new pairs or groups **should** be gradually introduced under the supervision of suitably trained and competent staff in a neutral environment where they can avoid one another if they so choose.

f) When dogs are brought to the kennels from the same household, pair-housing can work especially well in avoiding unnecessary distress. Whenever suitable facilities exist, these dogs **should** be housed together, unless behaviour as described above indicates otherwise.

k) Housing entire males and entire females where they can smell each other (within olfactory range) can cause frustration and **should** be avoided; housing males and females in separate kennel blocks, where available, can help.

n) Puppies that remain in the care of enforcement bodies after weaning **should** be housed with their littermates or with other puppies of a similar age and size. They **should** remain as a group unless their behaviour dictates otherwise and if the needs of each dog can be met. For example, establishments must ensure that the kennel is sufficiently large to allow each dog to be able to walk, turn around and wag his/her tail without touching the sides of the kennel, play, stand on his/her hind limbs and lie down without touching another animal or the sides of the kennel.

o) Puppies under 7 months of age **should** be housed somewhere safe and quiet preferably away from the main kennel block.

4.2 Human company

b) Dogs who enjoy human contact get more benefit from exercise if people are involved, so whenever possible such dogs **should** be exercised in the presence of people (see also section 3.1a). It is important that when staff are interacting with dogs, they are able to concentrate fully and so use of mobile phones or other distractions must not be allowed.

d) Staff must be able to identify a dog that is anxious or fearful about contact with people from his/her body posture. Photographs and videos of some of the behaviours described above can be found at <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/vetscience/services/behaviour-clinic/dogbehaviouralsigns/>. Such dogs **should** be slowly and patiently introduced to people and rewarded for calm behaviour. During this process, and until human contact becomes rewarding, additional enrichment **should** be provided, e.g. exercise, toys and feeding devices.

4.3 Staff training/competency

a) The establishment licence holder is responsible for ensuring that they and their members of staff have adequate knowledge and skills that must be kept up to date, so that they can implement the guidelines in this document and ensure the well-being of dogs in their care. The contract holder **should** check this prior to the contract being agreed.

5. HEALTH

Making sure dogs are protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

5.1 Health inspection responsibilities

- d) Where possible, all dogs **should** be examined by a veterinary surgeon within 72 hours of arriving at a kennel. Where requested, a report of their physical and psychological condition **should** be prepared for the kennel owner and seizing body.
- e) Further meaningful veterinary examinations **should** take place as needed – at least once a month – and a report submitted after each examination (see an example of a monthly health check sheet in Appendix V).
- g) During normal working hours dogs must be observed at regular intervals and at least three times each day. Out of normal working hours, dogs **should not** be left for more than 12 hours without being checked. The frequency of visits should be balanced against the possibility of disturbing the dogs, although exceptions will arise when dogs are ill or injured.
- h) Where appropriate, all adult dogs **should** be vaccinated by a veterinary surgeon within 72 hours of admission and as part of the initial assessment, unless evidence of previous vaccination is provided.
- i) Puppies **should** be vaccinated by a veterinary surgeon at eight weeks of age or an age that the veterinary surgeon deems appropriate.
- j) All dogs **should** have routine control of ecto- and endoparasites (e.g. worms, fleas, ticks, etc.) as directed by a veterinary surgeon. Records **must** be kept for veterinary and seizing body inspection.
- k) Any medication given must be prescribed for the individual animal by a veterinary surgeon, and each instance **should** be recorded.

5.3 Hygiene

- b) Separate cleaning utensils **should** be provided for each kennel block and **should** be colour coded.
- c) A cleaning schedule for the dogs' accommodation **should** be implemented and displayed; this **should** outline daily, weekly and monthly cleaning and disinfection duties. The cleaning must incorporate a recognised formulation effective against micro-organisms responsible for canine diseases, for example, bleach must not be used as it is harmful to dogs. However, any disinfectant used **must** be parvocidal. This programme **should** be included in the health plan developed with veterinary advice.

5.3 Husbandry routines

- b) Husbandry procedures **should** have a consistent daily pattern so that they are predictable to the dogs.
- d) Staff **should** avoid confining dogs to areas within the kennel when cleaning the kennel as this can result in fearful behaviour.
- e) Adult dogs **should** be given the opportunity to toilet regularly outside the space in which they are kept (e.g. their kennel).
- f) When removing individual dogs from kennels, staff **should** try to minimise disturbance to dogs in neighbouring kennels. For example, when leaving the kennel accommodation, staff **should** choose the exit that passes the fewest dogs (see also section 1.2c).

5.4 Isolation facilities

- a) Each establishment **should** provide isolation facilities that are physically isolated from all other dog housing.
- d) Procedures for quarantining new arrivals **should** be devised in consultation with a veterinary surgeon. When new arrivals show any signs of disease, veterinary advice should be sought before they are mixed with other dogs.

5.7 Euthanasia

b) When a dog dies suddenly or unexpectedly a post-mortem **should** be carried out to determine the cause of death and identify whether there is any disease or welfare risk to the rest of the kennel population. Where there is a disease risk, appropriate measures **should** be taken to protect the remaining dogs.

5.8 Restoration to owner

a) Any long-term-stay dog being returned to its owner **should** undergo a veterinary examination unless he/she has been seen by a veterinary surgeon within the preceding 14 days, or is a stray dog.