

Animal welfare is an increasingly important issue for communities across England, and as a critical partner on the frontline delivering animal welfare services, local authorities play a critical role in shaping outcomes.

This summary presents key findings from the RSPCA's 2026 Local Government Animal Welfare Survey, one of the only surveys of councillors' attitudes towards animal welfare. It's based on responses from over 500 councillors in England and across all political parties and council types.

The findings point to a clear and consistent picture:

- **Strong cross-party political support for animal welfare**
- **Delivery of core services, but limited strategic progress**
- **A significant opportunity to strengthen local leadership and impact**

FOREWORD

Animal welfare is increasingly recognised as a core issue for communities, and this report shows that councillors across England are responding.

There is clear, cross-party support for improving animal welfare, alongside a strong understanding of the concerns being raised locally. This provides a solid foundation for progress and reflects the important role councils play in shaping outcomes for animals and the people who care about them.

However, the findings also highlight a gap. **While support is strong, it is not yet consistently reflected in policy frameworks or long-term planning.** In many areas, activity remains reactive rather than preventative, and opportunities to embed animal welfare within wider strategies are being missed.

This is where the opportunity lies. By focusing on prevention, early intervention and responsible ownership, councils can deliver better outcomes for animals while also reducing pressure on services and supporting stronger communities.

Councillors have a key role in driving this forward - through leadership, partnership working, and using practical tools such as charters and council motions to embed change. At the RSPCA, we are here to support that journey. We offer guidance, resources and opportunities to help councils turn commitment into action.

The next step is clear: to build on this strong foundation and take practical action that delivers lasting impact for animals at a local level.



KEY FINDINGS:

1: STRONG CROSS-PARTY SUPPORT FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

Animal welfare is firmly established as a local political priority.

- 70% of councillors place animal welfare among their top priorities
- Support is consistent across political groups and leadership roles
- Councillors who prioritise the issue are significantly more likely to take action locally

THERE IS A STRONG AND BROAD FOUNDATION FOR ACTION, WITH POTENTIAL FOR CROSS-PARTY COLLABORATION.

2: COUNCILS ARE MAINTAINING ACTIVITY, BUT PROGRESS IS LIMITED

Councils are generally seen as performing adequately, but not advancing strategically.

- 76% of councillors rate their council's performance as average or good
- 86% report no improvement in performance over the past year
- Only 7% of councils have adopted an Animal Welfare Charter

WHILE BASELINE SERVICES ARE IN PLACE, ANIMAL WELFARE IS RARELY EMBEDDED AS A STRATEGIC PRIORITY.

3: LOCAL CONCERN IS DRIVEN BY VISIBLE, COMMUNITY ISSUES

Over two in three (67%) councillors cited wildlife protection as their primary concern, followed by animal cruelty and neglect (56%) and fireworks (55%).

Issues more directly linked to council services are cited less often: Animal Licensing (40%), Housing (24%), and Stray Dogs (17%).

ANIMAL WELFARE IS INCREASINGLY FRAMED AROUND COMMUNITY IMPACT AND PUBLIC CONCERN.

4: STRONG SUPPORT FOR PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Councillors show clear backing for preventative approaches.

- 82% support implementing wildlife protection initiatives
- 77% support promoting responsible pet ownership
- 65% support stronger fireworks regulation

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES ARE SEEN AS THE MOST EFFECTIVE ROUTES TO IMPROVING OUTCOMES

5. A GAP BETWEEN POLITICAL SUPPORT AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Despite strong interest, animal welfare is not yet embedded in most councils.

- Only 7% of councils have a formal Animal Welfare Charter
- 76% of councillors report no formal framework or are unsure of their council's position

THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO MOVE FROM INFORMAL ACTIVITY TO STRUCTURED POLICY.

6. COUNCILLORS ARE READY TO ACT, IF GIVEN CLEAR PATHWAYS

Councillors are most likely to support actions that align with formal council processes, including:

- Adopting an Animal Welfare Charter
- Proposing council motions
- Embedding animal welfare within existing strategies

ACTION IS MOST LIKELY WHERE THERE ARE PRACTICAL MECHANISMS WITHIN COUNCIL SYSTEMS

7. STRONG DEMAND FOR PRACTICAL GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

There is widespread openness to support: almost nine in ten (88%) of councillors are open to or would benefit from additional guidance.

Priority areas include: public awareness campaigns, training and guidance for councillors and officers, case studies and best practice, and policy templates and tools

COUNCILLORS ARE NOT ONLY SUPPORTIVE, THEY ARE ACTIVELY SEEKING PRACTICAL TOOLS TO DELIVER CHANGE

CONCLUSION

The survey highlights both a challenge and an opportunity. Animal welfare is widely supported across local government, but it is not yet consistently embedded within council policy frameworks or strategic priorities.

At the same time, councillors:

- Recognise the importance of the issue
- Understand the concerns of their communities
- Show a clear willingness to act

The opportunity now is to translate this into consistent, practical action at a local level.

NEXT STEPS FOR COUNCILLORS

Councillors can take forward animal welfare in their area through a small number of practical steps:

- **Provide leadership** by raising animal welfare within council discussions and priorities
- **Embed policy** through tools such as Animal Welfare Charters and council motions
- **Focus on prevention** through responsible ownership, public awareness and early intervention
- **Work in partnership** to share learning and deliver effective local solutions

SUPPORT FROM THE RSPCA

The RSPCA is working with councillors and local authorities to support stronger local action on animal welfare.

We can provide:

- Practical policy tools, including charters and model motions
- Guidance and best practice
- Campaign resources and local engagement support
- Opportunities to connect with other councillors

TAKE ACTION TODAY

There is a clear opportunity for councils to strengthen their approach to animal welfare.

We invite councillors to take the next step by:

- Exploring how animal welfare can be embedded within their council's priorities
- Considering the adoption of an Animal Welfare Charter
- Engaging with available tools, guidance and support

To find out more and access resources, contact Lee Gingell (lee.gingell@rspca.org.uk) or visit our Local Government Hub [online here](#).