

## Consultation response

---

### Licensing of dog breeding in Carmarthenshire

May 2024

RSPCA Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to Carmarthenshire County Borough Council's consultation on the licensing of dog breeding in the county. With Carmarthenshire being among the regions which has the highest number of licensed breeders in both Wales and England, this consultation is both much welcome and highly applicable.

Dog breeding is a complex and emotive issue which can have serious consequences for animal welfare as well as requiring significant resources from both public services and rehoming charities. Wales has long played a pivotal role in the UK's dog breeding and purchasing market. According to the most recent National Survey for Wales which included questions relevant to companion animals, 36% of households have a dog - making them the most common type of pet in Wales - with around a third of newer purchasers having acquired their dog from a licensed breeder<sup>1</sup>. Meanwhile, the UK is estimated to have a population of at least 11 million pet dogs, with just under a third of households having a canine companion<sup>2</sup>. Wales has traditionally been a key supplier of dogs and puppies into this market, with Carmarthenshire - along with neighbouring counties such as Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire - historically known as being a hotspot for both licensed and unlicensed activity.

For the last three years, RSPCA Cymru has requested data via the Freedom of Information Act from all of Wales' 22 local authorities to confirm how many enquiries each received around dog breeding over the previous 12 months, along with how many subsequent investigations and prosecutions were undertaken. According to the research we have conducted, Carmarthenshire has consecutively received the highest number of enquiries around dog breeding of all of Wales' local authorities since 2020. The number of enquiries the local authority received peaked in 2020 at 221 before gradually decreasing to 62 in 2023. Meanwhile, the number of investigations increased year-on-year between 2020 and 2022 before reaching their lowest last year - most likely as a result of fewer enquiries along with the numerous prosecutions undertaken by the local authority in recent years potentially acting as a deterrent.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	TOTAL
<b>Enquiries</b>	221	149	114	62	546
<b>Investigations</b>	58 (26%)	72 (48%)	114 (100%)	50 (80%)	294
<b>Prosecutions</b>	-	2	7	2	11

---

<sup>1</sup> National Survey for Wales 2021-2022 [Accessed February 2024]

<https://www.gov.wales/national-survey-wales-headline-results-april-2021-march-2022-html#101015>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pdsa.org.uk/what-we-do/pdsa-animal-wellbeing-report/uk-pet-populations-of-dogs-cats-and-rabbits>

## **Do you think that illegal dog breeding is an issue?**

Illegal and irresponsible dog breeding can be a lucrative and profitable venture for those involved in this immoral activity, with the lack of local authority oversight in these operations meaning that there is no way to ensure that dog welfare is being adequately protected. Unlicensed vendors and breeders may provide the lowest animal welfare standards as they are never inspected. How a dog is bred and reared can significantly influence the development of problematic behaviour and behaviour problems later in their life, with this having a potential knock-on effect on public safety as well as both human and animal welfare. Over the years, our inspectors and officers have assisted with numerous local authority investigations into illegal dog breeding. We have therefore seen first hand how animal welfare can become seriously compromised within such operations as a result of profit being prioritised over animal health and wellbeing. We therefore consider illegal dog breeding to be a serious animal welfare issue, which needs tackling on a consistent basis.

As well as having received the highest number of enquiries and undertaking the highest number of investigations of all of Wales' local authorities, Carmarthenshire has also undertaken the most prosecutions by far. According to our data, the local authority has undertaken at least 11 relevant prosecutions since 2020, with no other local authority having undertaken more than three over the same time period. The high number of prosecutions undertaken in recent years - which have seen substantial amounts of illegally made money recovered - indicate that the illegal breeding of dogs remains an issue in Carmarthenshire.

## **Do you think the council should investigate illegal dog breeding even if it hasn't received a complaint from the public?**

We would encourage all local authorities to undertake a proactive approach towards investigating any suspicions related to illegal dog breeding - regardless as to whether a public complaint has been received or not. With Carmarthenshire being a largely rural county, keeping illegal dog breeding operations out of sight is potentially less challenging than in some of Wales' more populated areas. However, with some illegal breeders in the area having turned to online sites to advertise their puppies, the local authority has successfully prosecuted a number of cases in recent years, including at least two in the last year. This demonstrates the importance of proactively monitoring the relevant online activity on an ongoing basis, as Carmarthenshire currently does. Carmarthenshire's responsive approach to the enquiries it has received around dog breeding over the last two years has seen between 80-100 per cent of those received investigated according to research by RSPCA Cymru - marking a significant improvement in comparison to previous years as outlined above.

## **What is your understanding of a licensed breeder?**

There is a significant difference between licensed and unlicensed breeders, with the former also placing significant pressure on the local authority in terms of the resources required. Licensed breeders produce and sell puppies on a commercial basis as a way of generating income. As it stands, there is no minimum litter threshold for puppy sellers under the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals (Wales) Regulations 2021. Meanwhile, a dog breeder only needs to be licensed if they meet the minimum threshold of three or more litters annually. While all licensed breeders are required to meet a certain standard in order to obtain local authority licensing, some breeders will be operating to a higher standard than others. For example, some licensed breeders will go above and beyond to provide their puppies with various experiences and forms of enrichment to ensure they become well-rounded adults that can live happily and safely with the home environment and the wider community. Meanwhile, others may only seek to meet the minimum standard required for licensing purposes while some breeders may not want to be licensed to

reduce costs and/or to evade monitoring. It is therefore vital that the relevant legislation has animal welfare at its forefront and that it is robust enough to ensure that animal health and wellbeing is being protected and prioritised accordingly. It is also important that any complaint regarding a breeder is investigated - regardless as to whether they are licensed or not.

### **Do you think that licensed breeding is an issue?**

While it could be said that licensed breeding is an issue in terms of the amount of resources it requires from local authorities, it is highly important that said resources are in place to prevent those who want to breed puppies from doing so illegally. The licensing of dog breeding is necessary to safeguard animal welfare and should therefore be prioritised by all local authorities. While the data we have collected will inevitably see some overlaps between both licensed and illegal dog breeding, it suggests that Carmarthenshire County Council undoubtedly faces one of the biggest challenges in terms of addressing these resource intensive issues, with both being particularly common in the county. As it stands, Camarthenshire has around 71 licensed dog breeders - among the highest in both England and Wales - with around 10 of these breeders having more than 100 dogs each<sup>3</sup>. In terms of commercial and licensed dog breeding in the area, many farmers in and around Carmarthenshire have diversified in recent years, which means that dog breeding has become an important part of their income to an extent that it is supporting employment in some of our most rural areas. It is therefore imperative that the relevant support is in place for the local authority - both via assistance from Animal Licensing Wales and otherwise - so that Carmarthenshire can continue to uphold, and build on, its recent track record when it comes to licensing dog breeding and tackling illegal activity.

### **Are you familiar with the two pieces of legislation that covers the breeding/selling of puppies namely the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals (LAIA) Wales Regulations 2021.**

We are aware that the relevant legislation is currently split between the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals (LAIAR) Wales Regulations 2021. With RSPCA Cymru having been present at both of the Welsh Government's workshops that have been held since last October's initial summit, we have heard first-hand from those who are responsible for enforcing these laws that it can be confusing having to consider two separate pieces of legislation that sometimes contradict each other. This is particularly notable as the one piece of legislation - LAIAR - has animal welfare standards whereas the 2014 regulations do not. We would therefore encourage consideration to be given by the Welsh Government and local authorities as to how bringing these two pieces of legislation together under one framework - such as LAIAR - could assist enforcement officers by helping to simplify and streamline the process for all.

### **Do you think that these two pieces of legislation are robust enough?**

RSPCA Cymru has long called for a review to be undertaken into the 2024 regulations. Such a review could ensure that these regulations are fit for purpose and applicable to today's dog breeding market with much having changed in terms of the way - and which - dogs are bred in the ten years that have passed since their introduction. Following the Welsh Government's initial Responsible Dog Ownership summit last October, RSPCA Cymru welcomed the inclusion of updating and future-proofing Wales' Dog Breeding Regulations as one of the potential outcomes in the written statement that followed<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/dog-breeding-carmarthenshire-council-puppies-28309601>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-responsible-dog-ownership-summit-action-dangerous-dogs-outcomes-and-next-steps>

In 2019, a Task and Finish Group of the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group made a series of recommendations as to how the 2014 regulations could be made more robust<sup>5</sup>. Among the group's 55 recommendations was the suggestion to amend the current staff-to-dog ratio from 1:20 to 1:10. The current ratio of 1:20 equates to staff having a total of around 21 minutes per dog each day, which is not enough to meet their welfare needs nor to meet the recommended exercise time as stated in the draft guidance. Meanwhile, an improved staff to adult dog ratio of one full time person to ten dogs would allow for one hour of socialisation and enrichment per litter per day - based on an average of three litters present per 20 dogs - as well as 36 minutes per adult dog per day for all other tasks.

The group's recommendations generally include more emphasis on the enrichment and socialisation of puppies to ensure that they are well adjusted to humans and the home environment once they have been purchased and it is hoped this will be prioritised in the upcoming review. In the decade that has passed since the introduction of the 2014 regulations, we are now more aware than ever of the need to consider a dog's mental health as well as their physical wellbeing to ensure that they make suitable pets who can live happily with families and within communities. Requiring twice annual inspections and unannounced inspections by local authorities was another recommendation that was made by the group, along with the introduction of a 'scores on the doors' system alongside the introduction of a Wales National Database of Breeders to improve traceability.

Outside of the recommendations made by the group, we encourage the Welsh Government to amend the regulations to fully cover stud dogs and require all breeders to be licensed, regardless of the amount of litters they produce. Regulating Canine Fertility Clinics - with Carmarthenshire among the areas which has seen such premises open their doors according to research by RSPCA Cymru - and tackling those who allow non-veterinary staff to perform invasive and sometimes surgical procedures is also much-needed. We are also supportive of local authorities being required to refuse licensing for those breeding for extreme confirmations and for those using physically and/or mentally unhealthy dogs for breeding purposes.

Many of the recommendations above could go a long way in terms of protecting the welfare of the dogs used for breeding and their litters and it is hoped that a review of the 2014 regulations will see them modernised so that they are fit for purpose in terms of tackling the issues associated with today's breeding industry. However, if any changes are to have the desired effect in terms of improving animal welfare, it is imperative that any changes are both robust and enforceable and that Wales' local authorities have the relevant resources and financial support. We would therefore welcome any opportunity to work with Carmarthenshire County Council - with the local authority likely to be among the most affected by any changes - to assist in terms of calling for the relevant resources for Wales' local authorities.

**Do you feel that there are sufficient resources allocated to the regulation of dog breeding in Carmarthenshire? Currently Carmarthenshire County Council employs 1.8 officers to deal with all animal licensing activities.**

With Carmarthenshire having just 1.8 officers to deal with all animal licensing activities according to the relevant consultation document - whose remit includes pet boarders, dog breeding establishments, pet shops, riding schools and more - RSPCA Cymru would agree with any concerns the local authority has around a lack of resources in the county.

Ensuring that Carmarthenshire has enough resources now is especially important, with it likely that Wales' local authorities will have more animal welfare legislation to enforce in the near future as a result of the recent conclusion of the Welsh Government's consultation on the licensing of animal establishments, activities<sup>6</sup>. The regulation of animal sanctuaries, rescues and rehoming centres and animal exhibits are two potential outcomes of this consultation, with the Welsh Government having committed to such action in the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales<sup>7</sup>. It is therefore vital that the local authority has the resources it so clearly needs in place before additional legislation is introduced.

The Welsh Government has invested in training opportunities via Animal Licensing Wales to ensure that all animal licensing officers have the correct skills and experience needed to assess welfare standards and can concentrate on licensing only the relevant activities. With Animal Licensing Wales having recently assisted Carmarthenshire in terms of freeing up the local authority to undertake prosecutions, it is vital that such support remains available on an ongoing basis, if needed.

### **What would you like us to do about illegal breeders?**

RSPCA Cymru would highly encourage Carmarthenshire County Council to continue undertaking the same proactive approach towards tackling illegal dog breeding in the county as it has done in recent years. With significant and demonstrable improvements having been made, Carmarthenshire County Council has rightly been praised for its proactive approach towards the relevant issues. In January, the work of Carmarthenshire CBC was praised by several Members of the Senedd in Plenary following the announcement of the local authority's ongoing review into dog breeding late last year<sup>8</sup>. With the aforementioned number of investigations and prosecutions having the potential to act as a real deterrent to those considering the illegal breeding of puppies, it is highly important that this momentum is not lost. With sums of up to £100,000 having been received as a result of the recent prosecutions undertaken by Carmarthenshire, continuing to tackle and prosecute illegal breeders is also important in terms of ensuring that the local authority has access to funds that can be used to ensure animal welfare is being protected appropriately. If the same proactive approach towards illegal breeders was undertaken on a permanent basis, Carmarthenshire could certainly provide a model of best practice for other local authorities - in Wales and further afield.

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/licensing-animal-welfare-establishments-activities-and-exhibits>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-11/animal-welfare-plan-wales-2021-26.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/13683>