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Introduction

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) is the world's largest and oldest animal welfare charity, with us having celebrated our 202nd anniversary on the 16th of June.

The RSPCA is the only charity with officers working on the ground across Wales to respond to reports of animal cruelty and neglect from the public. We currently have 29 inspectors and animal rescue officers (AROs) working across Wales to save suffering animals while also offering practical support and advice to animal owners and keepers in need of assistance. Our inspectors and AROs are currently responding to around 5,000 cases that specifically involve animal cruelty and neglect in Wales on an annual basis, with more than 900,000 calls from Wales and England made to our cruelty line every year.

As well as providing vital frontline services designed to protect the animals that need us most, we also play a key role in ensuring that all animals are covered by the legal protections they need and deserve. We do this by working with governments and elected officials from all political parties and look forward to working with the new Welsh Government and Senedd to make Wales an even better place for animals over the coming years.

In this briefing:

Local authority dog breeding investigations up 46%. According to brand new data collected by RSPCA Cymru, the number of local authority investigations relevant to dog breeding increased by 46% in 2025 in comparison to the previous year. In 2025, Wales' 22 local authorities undertook 210 investigations - up from 144 in 2024. Carmarthenshire County Council undertook the highest number of investigations, followed by Ceredigion and Cardiff Councils, with a number of relevant prosecutions having also been completed.

Licensing animal sanctuaries, rescues and rehoming centers. With a new Senedd term now underway, we are renewing our long-standing calls for the much-needed licensing of animal welfare establishments (AWEs) such as sanctuaries, rescues and rehoming centers. Unbeknownst to many, any person, organisation or establishment can call themselves a 'sanctuary' or 'rescue' without needing to prove that they have the skills, knowledge and experience to care for vulnerable animals. As such, a licensing system is urgently needed to protect animal welfare and ensure a consistent approach across the sector.

RSPCA Cymru calls for urgent action to improve horse welfare. We are currently experiencing a high number of reports relevant to tethered horses and semi feral/feral ponies in Wales. With us sharing the concerns of members of the public and elected officials with regards to equine welfare, we are urging Members of the Senedd to help us call for a Welsh Government-led review of the relevant legislation, the Control of Horses (Wales) Act 2014.

Please find more information on these topics below.

Dog breeding investigations by local authorities on the rise

According to our newest statistics, the number of investigations relevant to dog breeding undertaken by Wales’ 22 local authorities increased by 46% in 2025. Wales’ local authorities are responsible for the licensing of dog breeding establishments, as well as tackling the scourge of illegal breeding in our communities. In 2025, 210 investigations were undertaken, up from 144 in 2024. This is the first time investigations have increased year-on-year since we began collecting such data in 2020. Carmarthenshire County Council undertook the highest number of investigations, having investigated all 46 reports it received from the public. Meanwhile, Ceredigion Council undertook 39 investigations, followed by Cardiff Council who completed 30.

While the number of reports councils received decreased slightly from 244 in 2024 to 222 in 2025, the number of investigations required demonstrate that dog breeding is still a prevalent issue throughout Wales. As well as a high number of investigations, seven relevant prosecutions were also completed last year, with Carmarthenshire having undertaken three of these. The other prosecutions were undertaken by Newport City Council (2), Cardiff Council (1) and Conwy Council (1), demonstrating the geographical spread of such offences.

While the proactive approach that is being undertaken by local authorities is clear to see, a review of the relevant legislation - the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) Regulations 2014 - is much-needed and well overdue. With Plaid Cymru having included a commitment to promote responsible pet ownership and breeding in its [election manifesto](#), we hope that such action will be forthcoming in this Senedd term to ensure that the regulations are strengthened in terms of the protection they offer breeding dogs and their pups.

Dog breeding is undoubtedly a complex and emotive issue which can have serious consequences for animal welfare as well as requiring significant resources from both public services and charities. 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 of ensuring that dog welfare is being protected. Fortunately, we are still seeing offenders being prosecuted for such offences in Wales on a relatively consistent basis, thanks to the proactive approach undertaken by local authorities with the support of Animal Licensing Wales (ALW) - the Welsh Government’s local authority enforcement project.

ALW provides local authorities with training and physical resources so that they are able to enforce animal welfare legislation as effectively as possible. ALW undertakes investigations and prosecutions in conjunction with local authorities, one of which recently saw a dog breeder based in Pontypool (Sir Fynwy Torfaen) [sentenced](#) after admitting a number of animal welfare offences and breeding dogs illegally. While the project was awarded [£1 million](#) in continued funding earlier this year to enable it to continue until 2027, we are calling for the project to be extended further and to receive multi-annual funding going forward. Wales is the only country with a dedicated local authority enforcement project relevant to animal welfare and it is vital that it continues to offer an extra layer of protection for vulnerable animals while also acting as a deterrent against illegal breeding.

Questions to consider:
1. <i>Will the Cabinet Minister make a statement on the new Welsh Government’s plans to tackle the issues relevant to both legal and illegal dog breeding?</i>
2. <i>How will the new Welsh Government support local authorities to ensure they have the resources they need to licence dog breeders while also addressing any illegal activity?</i>
3. <i>Can the Cabinet Secretary make a statement on the future of Animal Licensing Wales?</i>

Securing the licensing of animal sanctuaries, rescues and rehoming centers

Among RSPCA Cymru’s biggest priorities over this Senedd term is securing the regulation of animal welfare establishments (AWEs) such as sanctuaries, rescues and rehoming centers. With us having been involved in four prosecutions relevant to AWEs in Wales in recent years, we are urging the new Welsh Government to work with us and others across the sector to bring forward a licensing scheme for these settings. With us having called for such action from the Welsh Government for a number of years, the confirmation provided by the Cabinet Minister for Rural Resilience and Sustainability during a [Senedd statement](#) on his portfolio’s priorities that a relevant pledge will be included in a new Animal Health and Welfare Plan is much welcome.

As well as providing a vital frontline service through our inspectorate, the RSPCA also finds new families for hundreds of animals a year in Wales through our own AWEs. We have two national centers in Newport and Bryn-y-Maen in Colwyn Bay, with additional support provided by our dedicated branches, such as Llys Nini in Swansea. Together, these centers and branches give animals who have often been through unimaginable suffering a second chance.

Unbeknownst to many, AWEs are not currently subject to any licensing or external oversight which means that anyone can set one up, regardless as to whether they have the experience, skills, funds or knowledge to care for vulnerable animals. While many AWEs undertake incredible work to help animals in need, with such establishments operating across Wales, a lack of oversight, scrutiny and regulation means that welfare issues can escalate at establishments, with owners at risk of becoming overburdened.

Ensuring that AWEs always have enough competent staff to care for the animals as needed can be a challenge - especially as many undertake their duties on a voluntary basis. Additionally, many centers and rescues are entirely funded by donations from well-meaning members of the public - the majority of whom are unaware that these establishments are currently unlicensed and/or unregulated, according to our previous research. Being reliant on an inconsistent donations-based model can lead to AWEs struggling financially, which has led to animal welfare failures in such settings. The licensing of such establishments under the pre-existing Licencing of Activities Involving Animals (Wales) Regulations 2021 would go a long way towards protecting the welfare of the often vulnerable animals found within AWEs while also ensuring consistent standards across the sector and providing a mechanism for intervention before animal welfare is compromised.

The previous Welsh Government consulted on such proposals in 2024, with [82%](#) of respondents in favour of such action, with recent research undertaken by the Animal Welfare Network for Wales (AWNw) indicating that the majority of AWEs support the regulation of our sector and consider themselves ready for licensing. A relevant pledge was also included within Plaid Cymru’s election [manifesto](#), in addition to the aforementioned confirmation given by the Cabinet Minister, with it hoped that these will lead to the long-overdue introduction of regulations for AWEs over this Senedd term

Questions to consider:
1. Will the Cabinet Minister make a statement on the Welsh Government’s plans to regulate animal welfare establishments such as sanctuaries, rescues and rehoming centers?
2. Can the Cabinet Minister provide a timeframe for the licensing of animal welfare establishments such as sanctuaries, rescues and rehoming centers in Wales?
3. Can the Cabinet Minister provide a timeline for the publication of the Welsh Government’s new Animal Health and Welfare Plan?

RSPCA Cymru calls for urgent action to improve horse welfare

With the number of reports we received surrounding tethered horses having almost doubled in 2025 in comparison to the previous year, we are calling on the new Welsh Government to commit to a review of the relevant legislation, the Control of Horses (Wales) Act 2014.

While this legislation was brought forward 12 years ago to give local authorities the power to seize and impound horses found to be straying, fly-grazing or abandoned public land, we often hear that they are under-resourced in terms of being able to utilise it. As such, a number of areas in Wales have become synonymous with issues surrounding horses and ponies, many of which are in poor condition. For example, we regularly receive reports relevant to semi-feral/feral ponies in areas such as Gelligaer, near Caerphilly and the Black Mountains and tethered horses in Cardiff, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and elsewhere. In 2025, we received 122 reports relevant to tethered horses, in comparison to 66 in 2024. We have already received 67 relevant reports in 2026, with half of the year still to go.

While it is a method that we are opposed to, equine tethering remains a legal practice that is commonly used by some horse owners. Being tethered restricts an equine’s ability to exercise freely, perform social behaviour and to forage, while also restricting their access to water and shelter and preventing escape from attacks by other animals. Meanwhile, the Welsh Government’s own [Code of Practice](#) advises against using tethering as a long-term means of managing horses. Members of the public who report tethered horses - those who are restrained with a rope, chain, strap or cord by the sides of roads, on roundabouts, in fields and other similar settings - are often surprised to hear that this remains entirely legal.

It is expected that the issues relevant to tethered and straying horses will come before the Senedd’s new Petitions Committee later this year, with a [petition started in March](#) having reached the 10k threshold for a Senedd debate in a matter of days. This petition followed an [incident on Rover Way, Cardiff](#) in March which saw a pony die after being hit by a car, with it estimated that at least 20 similar incidents had occurred in the months that preceded the incident.

With the RSPCA having no statutory legal powers - and with it often not clear who owns or is responsible for some tethered horses - our hands are often tied in terms of what we can/cannot do. Us being able to help animals often relies on the cooperation of their owners - something which is challenging to gain if they are not present or in sensitive situations. With there being no legislative measures that are specifically relevant to horse tethering, our officers are only able to help animals being managed in this way if they are injured or in bad condition, with the help of the relevant local authority or police often needed to do so.

Semi feral/feral ponies produce an entirely different challenge, with those that have been reported to us sometimes being difficult to find and reach as they cover vast areas and are highly mobile and also because some will be owned while others are not. Still, a number of charities which cover equines - including ourselves - have performed rescues in places such as Gelligaer and the Black Mountains, although being able to do so on a regular basis is not always possible due to limited resources. As such, we are calling for a review of the Control of Horses (Wales) to facilitate discussion between the relevant stakeholders as to what action is needed and is feasible in order to improve equine welfare throughout Wales.

Questions to consider:
1. Will the Cabinet Secretary outline the new Welsh Government’s plans relevant to equine welfare?
2. Will the Welsh Government consider a review of the Control of Horses (Wales) Act?
3. What action is the Welsh Government taking to address the issues relevant to equine tethering?

RSPCA Cymru incidents: February 2025 - May 2026

Between February 2026 and May 2026, the RSPCA responded to 1,832 incidents across Wales - a 0.86% decline on the previous year. However, this remains an exceptionally busy time for the RSPCA's officers, centres and branches, as well as the charity's emergency line.

Local authority	February 2025 - May 2025	February 2026 - May 2026
Blaenau Gwent	79	64
Bridgend	82	78
Caerphilly	97	112
Cardiff	176	174
Carmarthenshire	120	136
Ceredigion	35	26
Conwy	58	74
Denbighshire	54	66
Flintshire	77	89
Gwynedd	71	65
Isle of Anglesey	47	45
Merthyr Tydfil	66	46
Monmouthshire	39	43
Neath Port Talbot	97	85
Newport	63	77
Pembrokeshire	86	91
Powys	69	79
Rhondda Cynon Taff	168	150
Swansea	157	136
The Vale of Glamorgan	71	50
Torfaen	62	65
Wrexham	74	81
TOTAL	1,848	1,832

For more information on the contents of this briefing or any other matters relating to animal welfare in Wales, please contact:

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