

Appendix 1 – National Animal Licensing Team

It is still very much a project/pilot that is still developing and also expanding due to the Animal Plan for Wales into wider animal licensing aspects but still looking to make recommendations to WG on further improvements to the dog breeding controls already in place and hopefully close those loopholes. Ideally a requirement that no one can sell dogs, puppies, kittens without either a licence for commercial operations or registration for other sales (not already caught by the LAIA Regulations).

Objective

- Wales to be recognised as a World Leader by ensuring the highest levels of animal welfare through implementing a breeding, licensing and registration system, which enables consistent controls, enforcement and traceability. Using a robust legislative system to lay down minimum standards and drive improvements through the industry.

Aims

- To ensure all breeding dogs and their puppies have good health and welfare and a good quality of life.
- To ensure that puppies receive adequate enrichment and socialisation programmes to help equip them with the social and behavioural skills necessary to adapt to a home environment and live a good quality of life in the future.
- To implement a new model that will afford protection to legitimate breeders, enable the identification of illegal breeders and promote a fair trading environment by:
 - Requiring all breeders to be either licensed or registered,
 - Implementing a robust inspection procedure and consistent enforcement, and
 - Developing an intelligence capability to support enforcement work.

Barriers to enforcement exist and these have been recognised and identified both by local authorities and wider stakeholders, including; Identification of illegal and unlicensed breeders, Inconsistencies in inspections, lack of legal requirement for inspectors to be qualified or even a minimum level of competence (this also impacts on the quality of inspections undertaken), no central register of dogs and/or breeders to support checks or investigative work. Alongside lack of resource, ineffective penalties and problems with associated legislation such as the Microchipping of Dogs (Wales) Regulations 2015 this has created the significant problem now faced and it is quite clear that business as usual is not an option going forward. Inconsistent enforcement was attributed to the lack of expertise, in terms of both local authority and veterinary support, resources and difficulties with the legislation.

A review of the breeding regulations undertaken by members of the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group at the end of 2019 also identified important changes required to legislation, licencing conditions, enforcement shortfalls and resources. There were significant recommendations made some of which could be acted on immediately and others that required investment and time, in order to be implemented and deliver the desired change.

An online information system will provide not only a single point of reference/contact for all dog breeding related issues but also an associated back office system that will support both breeders, inspectors and purchasers.

Further to the work undertaken to produce the intelligence problem profile Operation CABAL, support was provided to develop the intelligence and progress more in-depth investigations. The additional enforcement and intelligence capacity has enabled the Regional Investigation Team to be tasked through the Regional Tasking Group with five separate operations although there are others requiring support. These include investigations involving identified organised criminal groups (OCGs) as well as cross border investigations that individual local authorities have been unable to progress alone.

The appointment of the animal licensing officers provides specialist support available for all local authorities. This support can be;

- On the end of the telephone in the form of specialist advice,
- Be a second pair of eyes and ears to help on inspections, or
- Can undertake inspections on behalf of local authorities where required and support investigations.

To date 7 LA's have had support with inspections and another two on specific investigations.

The main point though with the project is that changes will be required in order to ensure that the legislation is enforceable, alongside putting a consistent, strong, inspection regime. The national team support is already proving its value with the additional checks etc. undertaken and support provided.

Key Points:

- This is a Wales wide resource - to support and hopefully free-up local officers for other priorities.
- New Model for the wider industry being developed.
- Animal Welfare Plan for Wales clear on programme for Government commitments, so -
- WG trust and improved profile for Public Protection but if we don't embrace this opportunity it will be taken elsewhere.

It is envisaged a national model will:

- provide a centralised and standardised administration process for licence applications and a single point of reference for applicants and the public;
- ensure greater consistency in support both for businesses and enforcement/regulation agencies;
- create a standard model for future legislative developments;
- improve resilience across Wales for when individual Local Authorities experience unforeseen incidents which challenge business continuity