

Report to	Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	9th March 2023
Lead Member / Officer	Cllr Win Mullen-James (Lead Member for Local Development and Planning)
Head of Service	Emlyn Jones (Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services)
Report author	Glesni Owen (Public Protection Business Manager)
Title	Mistreatment of Dogs

1. What is the report about?

1.1. To examine the extent of legal and illegal dog sales within Denbighshire (particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic) – including the number of complaints received, investigated and substantiated and how various agencies work together to tackle any problems reported.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1. Determination of whether working relationships need to be strengthened or improved in order to deal with any problems or deter future problems in relation to this matter with a view to supporting the viability of properly licensed traders to operate thus reducing the suffering of the animals.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1. That Members discuss the contents of the report and provide feedback and observations on its content.

4. Report details

Background

- 4.1. The Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014 ('the Regulations') replaced the Breeding of Dogs Act 1973 in Wales and provides for the licensing by Local Authorities ('LAs') of persons involved in the breeding of dogs. The new Regulations introduced stricter criteria for breeding establishments and established an attendant to adult dog ratio at a minimum of one full-time member of staff to 20 adult dogs. The regulations were the first of their kind in the UK and, whilst many welfare organisations and charities had differing views on the contents of the regulations, they were widely welcomed. Since the introduction of the regulation there have been ongoing concerns about the standards at some licensed premises in Wales and the resources and expertise available within Local Authorities to tackle the issues.
- 4.2. Then in September 2021 the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021 (LAIA Regulations) came into force. These Regulations have changed the licensing arrangements for the sale of animals as pets in Wales, which includes a ban on the commercial third party sale of puppies and kittens. Optimising welfare standards across Wales is a priority and the intention of the new Regulations is to promote responsible breeding and ensure puppies and kittens are bred in suitable conditions.
- 4.3. As part of Welsh Government's (WG) commitments in the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales 2021-26 a WG funded project established a Local Authority Enforcement project to support local authorities with training and enforcement work. The project established a National Team of Animal Licensing Officers who work on a national basis to tackle illegal and unlicensed breeders and support local authorities with their investigations. Further information regarding how this project is supporting local authorities is outlined in **Appendix 1**.

Denbighshire's Current Position

- 4.4. Currently we have 13 licensed dog breeders located across the County. Licenses are renewed on an annual basis which includes a visit undertaken by our Animal Welfare Officer and a Veterinarian engaged by the authority who has extensive experience in this field of work. We have high standards of

compliance with licensing conditions. Our Licence holders work closely with our Officers if they require any advice or guidance.

- 4.5. Complaints received by the authority of unlicensed / illegal breeders are not significant. If we suspect that someone is breeding, they will receive a letter and application form to request they apply in order that an assessment can be made to ensure that are able to comply with the current Licensing Conditions.
- 4.6. We are currently investigating a small number of potential unlicensed breeders and have requested the assistance from the Animal Licensing National Team due to our limited resources within our Service to undertake extensive investigations.

Stray Dogs and Rescue Centres

- 4.7. During the pandemic there was a significant decrease in stray dogs enquires to the Dog Warden Service as outlined in Table below, however we are already seeing an increase in enquires for the Service during 2022 with 52% of those enquires in the latter part of the year.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Dog Warden - Service Request	296	286	159	140	176

Data accurate as of 16/12/2022

- 4.8 Two local Charitable Rescue Centres were contacted to gauge their experience of the impact the pandemic may have had on their Services. One charity did not respond, however North Clwyd Animal Rescue (NCAR) our authorised kennels for the Dog Warden Service provided some useful information. Details of their response can be seen in **Appendix 2**.
- 4.9 Information from NCAR and our own Dog Warden Service demonstrated that there was a significant decrease in stray dogs and dogs handed over during the pandemic. However, there is clear indication that these figures are on the increase to pre-pandemic levels.
- 4.10 NCAR have confirmed they currently have over 400 dogs on a waiting list awaiting handing over, this is the highest number since before the pandemic. The waiting list pre-pandemic was at approximately 100 dogs.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Themes?

5.1. Resilient Communities: The Council works with people and communities to build independence and resilience; - If people choose to purchase a dog for companionship and independence which may support them to live in their own home for longer and allow them to enjoy the countryside with the company of a dog. They know those dogs have come from a reputable breeder with all necessary health checks in place reducing the need for unnecessary costs and visits to the vets due to an unhealthy animal.

5.2. That the required licensed establishment complies with licensing standards and any planning requirements as not to cause noise or odour nuisance to surrounding neighbours.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1. Costs will be contained within existing service budgets

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

7.1. A well-being impact assessment was not required for the purposes of this report

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1. This has not been subject to a consultation process; however local pet Rescue charities were contacted and were asked to comment regarding the potential impact of the pandemic on their charities. The information and analysis of their responses have been outlined in **Appendix 2**.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1. There is no direct financial implication of this report, with any costs as stated in 6.1, being absorbed within existing budgets

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1. Current data would suggest that services provided by the Dog Warden Service may return to pre-pandemic levels and therefore capacity to undertake work in relation to illegal dog breeders will be affected. The National Team resources will be invaluable for the authority in support any investigations in the future.

10.2. Our findings conclude that current evidence suggests that the number of unlicensed breeders are low in the County. Of those which are known we will work closely with our National team to investigate potential illegal breeders.

10.3. We are not aware that the pandemic has had an impact on illegal breeding in the County, however as seen from the evidence in Appendix 2 there is a growing problem with dogs who require new homes which are clearly placing increased pressure on these charities.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1. The Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) Regulations 2014

11.2. The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021

11.3. Scrutiny's powers in relation to this matter are set out in Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 and Section 7 of the Council's Constitution.