



Royal
Kennel
Club

The Dog People's Manifesto

Calling on the incoming
Government to help the
nation's dog owners be able
to acquire healthy dogs and
care for their pets better





Introduction from Adrian Marett, Secretary, the Welsh Kennel Club

I'm a dog person and have lived with dogs my whole life. I am not unique; over one third of adults living in Wales have pet dogs¹ and it is imperative that the benefits of dog ownership continue to be enjoyed and the history of Wales as a 'dog loving nation' is maintained. Dog ownership has a huge positive impact on the mental health of all, from older to younger alike, of those who may otherwise be marginalised in society, as well as those who may be lonely, and encourages physical activity due to regular walking.

We are calling on the incoming Government to consider ways they can help 'dog people' by having due consideration for them with regards to suggested ways forward to improve dog welfare.

¹ [One in three homes in Wales now have a dog - BBC News](#)

Breeding

It is our view that the key to improving dog health, welfare and behaviour is to ensure a good supply of responsibly bred puppies. The hobby breeder has been the mainstay of dog breeding for the last 150 years.

As the only welfare centric organisation that represents dog breeders, we are calling on the incoming Government to help people who want to breed **healthy** puppies by limiting the Regulatory burden on home breeders and introducing a simpler tiered approach to licensing. We understand Government may wish to review their own dog breeding regulations following the election, and we very much hope that responsible dog breeders are engaged with the process.

The current regulatory framework is quite messy, with breeding regulations being applicable to those breeding 3 litters a year or more, but then a pet vending licence potentially being required for those breeding 1 or 2 litters who are considered 'in the business' of selling puppies. We don't believe awareness of the pet vending licence is high amongst the low volume breeding community and so as a result the regulations may not be being enforced as intended – possibly because the 'business test' element of the pet vending regulations causes confusion amongst breeders and local authorities.



We have learned from England that impractical licensing requirements, that are not health related, breed specific or practical for low volume breeders in terms of administration and bureaucracy have deterred many², which has resulted in a dwindling supply of dogs from high-welfare, low-volume breeders.

As a result, illegal high-volume puppy farmers, with poor husbandry and lack of care, plus European importers, are filling the gap in the market to the detriment of the long-term health and welfare of pet dogs.

We would therefore advocate:

- An overhaul of breeding and pet vending regulations and for the dual regulations to be replaced by a clear tiered approach to breeding regulations whereby for example, the regulatory framework would vary depending on the volume of litters a breeder breeds.
- For more flexibility to be brought into the regularly regime for those breeding one or two litters a year or less, to consider whether health testing and screening has been acknowledged.
- That to further encourage good breeding practices, the Government work more closely with the Royal Kennel Club and breed clubs to facilitate a mentoring programme whereby those who breed more frequently or have more knowledge of breeding dogs are paired with people who are planning their first litter of puppies.
- That to assist puppy buyers, puppy contracts like the Royal Kennel Club puppy contract should be advocated and recommended by Government to help ensure all breeders are adhering to basic health and welfare standards, including taking their puppy back if the new owner is unable to look after it, to relieve the strain put on rescue centres.
- Additionally, to follow what has been put in place in Scotland, the Government could develop a Code of Practice for those looking to purchase a puppy to try to ensure the process is fully considered.

2 Following the introduction of the 2018 Regulations, many low volume home breeders reduced the number of litters they bred, with some giving up breeding puppies at all. Based on our puppy registration data, we saw 20-25,000 fewer puppies per year being bred and registered with us by low volume, home breeders following the 2018 regulatory changes. Given that Royal Kennel Club registered puppies only account for around one third of annual supply, this may have resulted in excess of 50,000 fewer puppies each year being bred by low volume breeders.

Importing puppies - imports of cats, dogs and ferrets' regulations

At the time of writing, we have further concerns about potential unintended consequences of the Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill which is likely to soon receive Royal Assent and would apply across the UK.

We welcome the Bill as we have grave concerns about the circumstances in which large numbers of puppies are imported illegally in poor conditions and with health and socialisation issues – and the inevitable impact on rescue organisations as a result of poor breeding. However, we work with a community of breeders, who, for reasons pertaining to widening the gene pool within their chosen breed, and breeding away from breed specific health conditions, do import puppies younger than 6 months old. However, they will only ever import a single puppy at a time, and most will import only one puppy per year (or even less frequently). They import the puppy when they are young as it's vital to their socialisation and future behaviour that they are with their new owner at as close to 15 weeks of age as possible.

The Welsh Kennel Club actively encourages breeders to look at inbreeding coefficients prior to breeding to ensure that the long-term health and welfare of the breed is prioritised. If those who currently expend great effort and expense (totalling thousands of pounds), to do so by way of importing are no longer able to, we would be concerned about an increase in genetic health related problems particularly within numerically smaller breeds as demand for puppies could then be met by low welfare and commercially driven breeders who have less regard for breeding away from certain health defects.

We are therefore calling on an incoming Government to work with Defra on the detail of the Regulations with a view to ensuring that the permit scheme (which is embedded in the Bill) is available for use by breeders who can demonstrate a genuine need, from a genetic diversity perspective, to be permitted to import a single young dog under six months of age. We believe this could be readily achieved without creating unwanted loopholes.

Brachycephalic/flat-faced dogs such as Pugs, Bulldogs and French Bulldogs

Whilst there is a lot of criticism of how flat-faced dogs have been bred, it is their popularity amongst the dog-owning public, made worse by advertisement agencies and social media, that has exacerbated poor breeding practices. While demand for them may have now peaked and is in clear decline, the Royal Kennel Club still register a high number of these breeds and their health and welfare remain a key priority of our work. In 2016 we established the Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG), the first of its kind, comprising ourselves along with academic, veterinary, and welfare bodies, as well as government officials and breed clubs. The objective of the BWG is a world where no dog experiences health-related welfare problems attributable to having been selectively bred for the brachycephalic conformation. The strapline of the group is 'stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog', but this messaging alone is not enough.

We recognise that instead of just highlighting the risks of owning a typically brachycephalic dog, we also need to ensure they can be bred with an emphasis on their health and welfare so would-be owners can obtain a healthy example of the breed they desire. This is why we have invested significant resource into the development of the internationally recognised University of Cambridge/Royal Kennel Club Respiratory Function Grading scheme; the only scheme which assesses a dog's breathing and provides a grade which advises as to whether it should be bred from.

We are calling on the incoming Government to help people ensure their dogs live happy healthy lives by:

- Encouraging and educating breeders and puppy buyers on the advantages of the Respiratory Function Grading scheme and its importance for the health and welfare of their chosen dog breeds. Further information about the scheme can be found here [Respiratory Function Grading Scheme | Royal Kennel Club](#)



Dangerous dogs and XL Bully dogs

The Royal Kennel Club were disappointed at the addition of the XL Bully dog to the dangerous dogs list under the antiquated and discredited Dangerous Dogs Act, which has proved time and again to be an ineffective mechanism in preventing dog attacks and fatalities. The ban has caused anxiety and frustration amongst owners of dogs who may fit the very broad description of what an XL Bully is, as it is not a Royal Kennel Club registered breed with a breed standard. We understand that this is not a devolved issue however we do believe it would be beneficial for an incoming Government to work on more effective preventive strategies. A breed-neutral, preventative strategy is needed, that targets the root causes of dangerous dog incidents—irresponsible ownership, poor training, and a lack of early intervention.

We would advocate:

- The incoming Welsh Government to push the UK Government for a full review of data surrounding dog incidents and how the law works, to move towards a system that records incidents clearly, holds irresponsible owners accountable, and protects the public based on evidence.
- The incoming Welsh Government to work in partnership with police, Local Authorities and the third sector to ensure they have the powers and resources to act early - educating, supporting, and where necessary, intervening with dog owners to prevent problems before they escalate.

It is further our view that dog owner licensing would not be an effective solution to deal with this issue. Read more in our [dog licensing report](#).



Private and social rented housing

The private and social rental sectors are a significant barrier to pet ownership in Wales. Despite the growing reliance on the private rental sector, currently only eight percent of private tenants in Wales say their home was advertised as pet friendly³. This lack of pet friendly accommodation forces many tenants to make a difficult choice between keeping their pet or securing a home.

Restrictive pet policies are not only a leading cause of pet relinquishment, but they deny tenants the mental and physical health benefits of pet ownership, which can undermine wider government priorities such as Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales⁴ and Connected Communities⁵. Research shows that 82% of pet-owning tenants feel more settled in their accommodation and are more likely to remain in long-term tenancies—benefitting both landlords and tenants. While landlords often cite property damage as a concern⁶, recent research found that⁷: 76% of landlords reported no damage from pets; on average, the total reported cost by landlords of pet-related damage was £300, compared with £775 for non-pet-related damages; and on average, landlords can expect to gain more financially from renting to tenants with pets than they spend on associated expenses.

3 Dogs Trust and Cats Protection (2021) Pets and Landlords Survey. Available upon request.

4 [Healthy Weight Strategy Wales](#)

5 [Connected Communities Strategy](#)

6 [The financial impact of pet ownership in rental properties](#)

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We support the Companion Animal Welfare Group Wales in calling on the next Welsh Government to introduce a full Bill to improve access to pet friendly properties in the private and social rented sector, with legislation to:

- Introduce the right to request a pet without the request being unreasonably refused by the landlord.
- Provide guiding principles of what constitutes unreasonable grounds for refusal.
- Ensure that decisions on pets are upheld throughout the tenancy.
- Extend pre-tenancy discrimination protections to existing pet owners.
- Introduce a maximum response period of 28-days for landlords (including superior landlords) to respond to a request to keep a pet.

Wales must adopt an inclusive approach to pet ownership in private and social rented accommodation - one that reflects the current realities within the sectors and the value of the human-animal bond.

As an organisation which invests entirely in improving the health and welfare of dogs and working with responsible breeders, we very much look forward to working with the incoming Government.





Royal Kennel Club

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