

ANIMAL WELFARE & ANIMAL LICENSING

Committee name	Residents' Services Select Committee
Officer reporting	Daniel Ferrer, Licensing Team Manager
Papers with report	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Photographs of "Ronnie" – Appendix A- Photographs of "Frankie" – Appendix B- Council's Public Space Protection Order – Appendix C- SDK full annual report for 2024/25 - Appendix D
Ward	All

HEADLINES

This report provides information on the Council's responsibilities under animal welfare and animal licensing legislation. It provides an overview of activity, trends and enforcement cases and provides information on how residents can report intelligence and/or make complaints to the Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Select Committee:

1. Notes the content of this report

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

ANIMAL LICENSING

The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 set out the framework for licensing activities involving animals in England. These regulations came into force on 1 October 2018 and are designed to ensure the welfare of animals involved in various activities. This is the biggest step in improving welfare standards for animals for many years.

The regulations place a requirement on Local Authorities to have a competent and qualified Officer for the purposes of carrying out the inspection required under the regulations. Currently, the London Borough of Hillingdon has one officer that is qualified and another that is currently undertaking the training.

The activities covered by the regulations are selling animals as pets, providing boarding for cats, providing boarding for dogs in kennels, providing boarding for dogs in a residential home (Home Boarding), providing day care for dogs (Commercial business with no overnight stays for dogs),

providing boarding for cats (catteries), hiring out horses for riding or instruction, dog breeding (for those in scope of the regulations), and training animals for exhibition.

The regulations are supported by Statutory Guidance which makes up the conditions which operators must comply with. The regulations operate on a rating system (compliance with statutory guidance) and compliance history. The better the compliance, the better the Licence.

Licences vary in duration from 1 year to 3 years, and those with the highest standards of compliance with the conditions including the "Higher Standard" conditions would achieve a 3-year licence; those with compliance against all the mandatory conditions but not the higher standard conditions would receive a 2 year licence, and those with 1-2 minor failings against the mandatory conditions may achieve a 1 year licence. N.B, businesses that have a minor failing and achieve a 1-year licence must improve as a 1-year licence may only be issued once. If no improvements are made, then the business cannot be licensed.

Once a business is licenced, it must be inspected once more during the term of the licence. It must be noted that, for the initial inspection for Dog Breeding businesses, the Local Authority Officer must be accompanied by a veterinarian who must carry out their own inspection and provide a report and recommendation. Following the veterinarian initial inspection, veterinarians are not required to inspect again.

Hiring out horses for riding or instruction applications are also required to be initially inspected by an equine veterinarian along with the Local Authority officer, but due to there being a higher risk to the public in this activity, riding schools are required to be inspected every year by the LA and veterinarian.

Refusal and enforcement

Where a licence application is refused; the applicant may request a reinspection. Local Authorities do not have to accept every request for a reinspection, and where a notice of refusal has been issued, the applicant has 28 days to make an appeal to the First Tier Tribunal.

Where businesses are found not to be complying with the conditions laid out in the statutory guidance, the Local Authority has powers to suspend or vary the licence accordingly.

Businesses which are found to be operating in the absence of a licence can be prosecuted for the offence. This offence is contained within the Animal Welfare Act 2006 section 13 (Licensing or registration of activities involving animals) which is the overarching legislation to the 2018 Regulations. It is also an offence to advertise an animal business without a licence, and this is mostly found with dog breeding businesses where the puppies are advertised for sale, but the business is unlicensed. These unlicensed businesses often have very poor welfare standards, thereby exploiting the animals that they are breeding from and compromising the welfare of both the breeding dogs and the puppies. It should be noted that this is not limited to the breeding and sale of dogs but is also common with people breeding and selling cats and other animals such as birds and reptiles, which all fall into the activity of selling animals as pets.

Numbers of Licensed premises:

- Hiring out Horses – 3 premises which are all currently 3-year 5 star rated.
- Breeding Dogs – 1 premises that is 3-year 5 star rated.
- Boarding for Cats - 3 premises all 2-year 3 star rated
- Home Boarding Dogs - 5 premises – all 3-year 5 star rated
- Day Care for Dogs – 2 premises - all 3-year 5 star rated
- Providing Kennels for Dogs – 1 premises 3-year 5 star rated
- Selling Animals as Pets – 4 premises all 3-year 5 star rated.

Since the licensing of Activities involving Animal (England) Regulations 2018 came into force, three businesses providing boarding for cats have closed; one business was not compliant with the regulations and was not able to be licensed, one closed due to the lease on the property not being renewed and one has closed for refurbishment to become compliant with the regulations. There has also been the closure of one business providing day care for dogs due to the lease on the land not being renewed, and one business (riding School) closed due to financial reasons. There are also a number of businesses including Dog Breeding, Home Boarding and Dog Day Care that have not renewed their licence and may be potentially operating on an unlicensed basis. The Team is closely monitoring these premises.

Unlicensed Activities.

The Licensing Team is aware that there are many businesses in the Borough who are potentially operating on an unlicensed basis, and the most prevalent are those that breed and sell dogs which often have the poorest welfare standards. The other prevalent operation is providing Home Boarding for Dogs. The Team is focusing their efforts in these areas.

Unlicensed breeding of dogs - investigations

- 2025 - 5 cases
- 2024 – 6 cases

Unlicensed sale of animals as pets

- 2025 – 2 cases (1 cat breeder and 1 breeding other animals for sale as pets including birds)
- 2024 – 1 case (1 cat breeder)

Unlicensed operators generally have very poor standards in animal welfare and husbandry, but also as a result of the unlicensed activity, they deprive the Local Authority of licencing fees through the licensing system. These unlicensed businesses will also avoid paying taxes on earnings through the unlicensed businesses and often, as was seen in the breeding and sale of XL Bullies prior to the ban, these individuals are often involved or connected to criminal gangs and networks.

CASE STUDY: COLNE AVENUE

This 2018 case concerned unlicensed dog breeders. A couple in West Drayton, Galyna Khudyakova and Volodymyr Tymoshenko, were fined nearly £50,000 for breeding and selling dogs and cats without a license. They pleaded guilty to two offences at Uxbridge Magistrates Court. This followed a large and complex case where officers executed a search warrant in December 2018 revealing dozens of animals kept in poor conditions, with cages stacked from floor to ceiling and a room used for animal birthing. The Judge sentenced each defendant (identically) as follows:

1. Fine for each offence £4,500 (so £9,000 for each defendant)
2. Prosecution costs £15,000 each (so £30,000 between the defendants)
3. Victim surcharge £150 each
4. Total £24,150 in financial penalties/costs for each defendant - £48,300 in total.

In terms of the Possession Order the Council were awarded £282,738. These costs were high because the Council were responsible for boarding costs and animal care for every animal prior to the Possession Order being granted.

The defendants are currently continuing to pay these costs to the Council in monthly instalments of £350.

CASE STUDY: Current Prosecution (LIVE CASE)

Whilst specific details cannot be divulged at this time, there is an investigation into a property and those residing at the property which started in July 2020 with a number of complaints referred to the licensing team in relation to unlicensed breeding of dogs and poor welfare conditions. An intensive investigation took place and involved multiple agencies and organisations which culminated in a Warrant being obtained to enter and search the premises in December 2021. During the search in which officers were accompanied by a veterinarian, 16 adult dogs and 18 puppies were taken into possession due to poor welfare conditions. The investigation has led to a prosecution file being submitted relating to unlicensed breeding but also a charge for conspiracy to commit fraud due to the nature of the business. A court date of January 2026 has been given.

ANIMAL WELFARE CRIME & ENFORCEMENT

Hillingdon Council has two Licensing Officers that have, by virtue of the legislation and the authority, been appointed as animal welfare officers under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (as well as some other animal related legislation). This gives them powers under the Act to use certain parts of the legislation to enforce, investigate and even prosecute for Animal Welfare offences.

The most utilised sections of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 legislation by Officers are:

- **Section 4:** Unnecessary suffering of a protected animal
- **Section 9:** Establishes a duty of care for individuals responsible for animals, requiring them to take reasonable steps to ensure the welfare needs of those animals are met.
- **Section 10:** Serving Improvement notices for any offence under section 9 that may not be deemed serious enough to prosecute but that requires some intervention
- **Section 18.5 and 18.6:** Taking animals into possession that are deemed to be suffering, or that may suffer if the circumstances do not change
- **Section 20:** Orders in relation to animals taken into possession as above (under Section 18.5) such as taking over ownership of the animal so that it can be rehomed.
- **Section 23:** Applications for warrants to enter a premises to search for evidence in relation to offences under the act.
- **Section 30:** The section that allows for the local authority to prosecute for offences under the act.

Animal welfare reports are on the rise. In 2024 the Team received 9 complaints regarding animal welfare and, as of June 2025, the Team is already at 15 within the first six months. The majority come to the Team from residents complaining about neighbours, barking dogs, smelly premises or incidents they have witnessed. The police also have the same powers, and arguably more due to being able to make arrests etc, but with their ever-stretched resources, it often does, and should fall to the local authority to be able to use the legislation and the powers given by the legislation to act. The RSPCA also carry out investigations. It is important to remember though that they have no more powers than a member of the public regarding the Animal Welfare Act and as they are having to make more and more cuts for the charity to survive, they also have less capacity to take on investigations or prosecutions. Establishing a good working relationship alongside these partners is vital to gain the best intelligence and to try and prevent multiple agencies dealing with the same issue. This can prove challenging as there is no central database for this information, so officers need to rely on data request applications and a good relationship with local officers and RSPCA inspectors.

Where possible officers will attend addresses and locations where reports have been made and then make assessments once in attendance. They often have little information beforehand, hence risk assessments and evaluating whether any offences are present and their severity, are carried out on scene in most cases. Officers have a large case load so cases are prioritised as efficiently as possible, The Team would like to be more proactive, rather than reactive, but demand is high. Officers would like to deliver training in animal welfare to other Council departments that make regular visits to residents so they may have an idea of what to look out for or perhaps deliver training to residents themselves.

CASE STUDY: FREEZELAND WAY, STANWELL MOOR ROAD & BAYHURST WOODS HORSES

This case study details the swift and effective actions taken by officers to address the issue of abandoned horses on different sites within the Borough. Over the last six months, several horses were dumped on various areas of Council-owned land, prompting immediate action from the authorities.

- **Freezeland Way**, Uxbridge: Officers discovered three horses and a foal abandoned at Freezeland Way. Notices were served under the Control of Horses Act 2015, which allows for the detention of unlawfully grazing horses. Two horses were removed before the 96-hour notice period ended, while the remaining horses were taken into Council possession.
- **Stanwell Moor Road**: Eight horses were found on a large site with dilapidated stable buildings along Stanwell Moor Road. All horses were removed before the 96-hour notice period ended, ensuring their safety and well-being.
- **Bayhurst Woods**: Local residents reported three ponies abandoned near Bayhurst Woods. The ponies were removed to safety on January 14, 2025, following concerns shared on social media.
- **Cranford Park**: An incredibly sick pony, later named "Ronnie," was found abandoned at Cranford Park. Officers removed Ronnie within hours for veterinary treatment. He was later signed over to the RSPCA and has since recovered well.

The Control of Horses Act 2015 grants private landowners and local authorities the authority to detain horses unlawfully grazing on their land. If no owner is found within 96 hours of the notice, possession is taken by the council.

The main challenges for Officers during this operation included: finding homes, transport, and arranging logistics for the removal of the horses. However, the beneficial outcomes saw effective collaboration with other council departments, the RSPCA, transport companies, vets, and the equine charity World Horse Welfare that ensured all horses were removed safely and had somewhere to go, preventing the need for euthanasia or expensive bailiff services.

The worst welfare case involved "Ronnie", a pony in poor health. He was treated and has since recovered well. Ronnie now resides at the RSPCA Milbrook Centre and is hopeful for rehoming in the future.

Before and after photographs of "Ronnie" can be found at **Appendix A**.

CASE STUDY: JB - use of Section 20 Animal Welfare Act 2006.

This case study details the actions taken by officers to address the welfare concerns of two dogs owned by JB, a Council tenant living in sheltered housing. Over several months, the dogs were found in poor conditions, prompting immediate action from the authorities.

On October 31, 2024, JB had a fall at home and was admitted to hospital. Neighbours discovered the poor condition of her property, with dog faeces and urine throughout. JB had two dogs, Lilly and Bobby, without a care plan in place.

On November 8, 2024, the dogs were taken to kennels under the Care Act 2014. Lilly required immediate veterinary care due to unstable diabetes. JB returned home on November 25, 2024, and the property was cleaned. The dogs were returned on December 11, 2024, with improved health.

However, on December 21, 2024, JB was admitted to hospital again. Lilly was found very unwell and later died. Bobby required immediate veterinary care. Officers issued an Improvement Notice under Section 10 of the Animal Welfare Act on January 6, 2025, due to ongoing welfare concerns.

On March 10, 2025, Bobby was seized under Section 18.5 of the Animal Welfare Act. A Section 20 application was successful, granting possession to the Council for rehoming. Bobby was eventually rehomed via a charity.

The Care Act 2014 allows for the kennelling of animals when owners are unable to care for them. The Animal Welfare Act provides powers to issue Improvement Notices and seize animals in poor welfare conditions.

The main challenges in this case included managing the welfare of the dogs, cleaning the property, and arranging logistics for kennelling and veterinary care. Effective collaboration with the RSPCA, transport companies, vets, and equine charity World Horse Welfare ensured the dogs were cared for and rehomed.

Lilly required immediate veterinary care due to unstable diabetes and later died. Bobby required veterinary care and was eventually rehomed after being seized under the Animal Welfare Act.

The average cost of kennelling a dog is £35 per day per dog. The total costs for kennelling and veterinary care amounted to £18,131.48, plus £250 for the application.

CASE STUDY: – New case of unlicensed breeding & selling of dogs.

An address within the Borough first came to the Team's attention in September 2023 due to multiple complaints from neighbours and waste collection teams about fly-tipping of dog faeces. Initially, there was minimal evidence of dog breeding and selling, leading to a warning letter and a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) for fly-tipping. Recently, the same address resurfaced with referrals from Citizens Advice about a puppy with a serious heart condition and local police reporting an attack on a neighbour's dog. Data requests to advertising sites revealed prolific breeding and selling of dogs since 2022, with puppies sold for £3000 - £5000 each. Social media searches further supported this evidence; The address is a Council property with no permission to run a business. Efforts are underway to apply for a search warrant under Section 23 of the Animal Welfare Act to gather more evidence for prosecution. The goal is to address the issue of unlicensed breeding and selling in the Borough, a widespread problem across the country.

CASE STUDY: "FRANKIE" – on going investigation to consider FPNs

On March 31, 2025, an SDK (Contracted Dog Warden Service Provider) collection report raised immediate concerns for Animal Welfare officers when a stray dog, later named "Frankie", was found emaciated and suffering from a severe skin condition. The dog required urgent veterinary treatment. The owner listed on the microchip claimed to have given the dog to another person a week prior, who then reported finding the stray. Both parties refused to take responsibility for the dog. Officers suspected that Frankie's condition had deteriorated over a longer period, prompting an investigation.

Veterinary treatment was provided, and evidence was gathered to support a potential prosecution under Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006. The previous owners will be invited for a PACE-

compliant interview once all evidence is collected. After the required seven-day retention period, Frankie was sent to a charity and is expected to be rehomed. Officers visited Frankie two months later to document his recovery, which will be crucial evidence in demonstrating that his needs were not met by the previous owners, who also misused Council stray dog services.

Photographs of “Frankie” can be found at **Appendix B**.

This case is a good example of where PCNs for Animal Welfare offences may be well utilised in the future.

A penalty notice under the act gives an individual or body corporate (such as a company or charity) the opportunity to avoid prosecution for a criminal offence by paying a fee. Payment of a penalty notice does not require an admission of guilt and will not result in a criminal record.

Penalty notices will add to and complement the current suite of enforcement and regulatory options, such as:

- advice and guidance
- warning letters or statutory notices
- movement restrictions
- cautions and prosecutions

This is to support early redirection through behaviour change, to promote compliance with animal health and welfare rules.

Penalty notices are not designed for serious offences (or where a ban from animal ownership is sought) or for minor breaches where advice and guidance in the first instance would be sufficient in rectifying the issue. It enables fines to be given for up to £5000. Given the amount of time it takes for cases to be heard at court and the lenient sentences and fines being imposed when they get there, the PCN could be a good alternative in some cases, though prosecution will always be considered and will not be replaced. Any case where a PCN has been issued but then subsequently remains unpaid, will then require prosecution so careful consideration will need to be given to each case.

DOGS

Dangerous Dogs & XL Bullies

From 31 December 2023, The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 was updated so it made it against the law to:

- sell an XL Bully dog
- abandon an XL Bully dog or let it stray
- give away an XL Bully dog
- breed from an XL Bully dog
- have an XL Bully in public without a lead and muzzle

In addition, from 1 February 2024 it was made a criminal offence to own an XL Bully dog in England and Wales unless your dog has a Certificate of Exemption.

The responsibility for determining if a dog is an XL Bully rests with the owners; should the owners choose to ignore the change in legislation or refuse to accept that their dog is an XL Bully, this may still result in the dog being seized.

The Government Guidance regarding the XL Bully ban can be viewed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ban-on-xl-bully-dogs>

As is the case with current breed types that are prohibited, the police are the lead enforcement agency and will investigate for offences under Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. The Licensing Team work in partnership with police forces to share intelligence and information where appropriate if this relates to a Section 1 offence e.g. Illegal breeding, or if a suspected prohibited breed type is picked up as a stray once the ban is in force. Seizure of dogs that require to be seized under The Dangerous Dogs Act will be carried out by the Police; it will also be up to the Police to "Type" a dog that is either referred to them by a Dog Warden Service or seized by the Police.

The current situation within the London Borough of Hillingdon is that the Licensing Team are aware of one premises where there is a Community Protection Warning in place; this was issued to the owner due to the aggressive nature of the dogs - there are two XL Bully's at the property.

Since the 1 April 2023, SDK (Contracted Dog Warden Service Provider) have collected 3 XL Bullies which were returned to their owners.

The London Borough of Hillingdon have no Licensed XL Bully breeders, although Licensing is aware of a number that are potentially operating on an unlicensed basis. It is also understood that one particular unlicensed breeder is continuing to breed despite the ban coming into force. The Team is investigating and focusing efforts on these cases.

PSPO

The updated Council Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) which came into force on 1st May 2025 imposes a number of offences for dog walkers, they include:

- a person in sole charge of 4 dogs in a public space without a Dog Walkers licence
- a person in sole charge of 6 dogs in a public space with a Dog Walkers licence
- a person in charge of a dog that defecates on land within the 'restricted area' and fails to remove the faeces

The Council's full PSPO can be found at **Appendix C**.

The Council's Environmental Enforcement Team deals with offences under the PSPO by issuing Fixed Penalty Notices. Last year they received 82 complaints regarding dogs and issued 2 FPNs. The Team deals with these by installing signage in the area of concern (more specifically no dog fouling) and patrolling is actioned. Should offences be witnessed by officers, then FPNs will be issued.

Dog Walking Licences

Hillingdon has a voluntary professional dog walking licence scheme in place where persons who are paid to walk dogs need to be registered with the Council. This scheme helps maintain the environment and support the upkeep of the parks and people's enjoyment of them, through the effective management of commercial dog walking. Licence holders are subject to conditions of the licence and codes of conduct. There is a restriction on walking 6 dogs at a time in Hillingdon's green spaces. Those operating without a licence could face a fine of up to £100. Since the scheme started in 2019, the Licensing Team has issued 106 Dog Walking Licences.

Microchipping requirements

The Microchipping of Cats and Dogs (England) Regulations 2023 require that all cats and dogs in England be microchipped by a certain age and registered on a compliant database. Specifically, cats must be microchipped by 20 weeks of age, and dogs by 8 weeks of age. Failure to comply with these regulations can result in a fine of up to £500.

During the period 01/01/2024 to 31/12/2024 – of the 44 dogs that were reclaimed following collection as strays by the Council's contracted Stray Dog Service, SDK Environmental Services Ltd, only 30 were microchipped. It is likely that most owners would correctly microchip their dogs following receiving a warning letter, and over time increase the number of dogs that could be directly returned to owner and reduce the burden on the London Borough of Hillingdon in terms of rehoming fees. Therefore, officers will be focusing more on this area of work by following up on any non-microchipped dogs and by also providing education to the local community.

Barking dogs – CPN's/CPW's Noise nuisance

Persistent barking can constitute a statutory noise nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1980 and this issue is dealt with the Council's Environmental Protections Officers. The EP Team received 104 complaints last year for barking dogs.

In addition, under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 – Part 4, authorised officers are able to issue Community Protection Warnings (CPWs) and Community Protection Notices (CPNs) to correct the dog owners' behaviour where their dog is having a detrimental effect of a persistent or continuing nature, on the quality of life of those in the locality, and the conduct is unreasonable.

Impact of Covid and Cost of Living Crisis

There have been several reports highlighting the increase in abandoned dogs due to both the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost of living crisis. During the pandemic, many people adopted pets for companionship while staying at home. However, as life returned to normal, some pet owners found it challenging to manage their pets alongside their changing routines. This led to a significant rise in pet surrenders. Financial hardships also played a role, with many families struggling to afford pet care costs. The cost-of-living crisis has further exacerbated the situation. In the UK, for example, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) reported a 24% increase in abandoned animals in 2022. Rising costs of pet food, veterinary care, and other essentials have made it difficult for many pet owners to keep their pets.

At Hillingdon, The Licensing Team has seen some evidence that supports this. For example, from 2021/22 there was a 38% increase in dog collections from the Council's Stray Dog Service, SDK Limited. Furthermore, in the same period, although there was an increase in dogs returned to their owners, there was a 83% increase in dogs going to kennels and a 114% increase in dogs that needed rehoming.

The table below shows the previous 3 Year Statistics (October 2021 to September 2024)

	Oct 2021 - Sept 2022	Oct 2022 - Sept 2023	+/- on previous year	October 2023 - Sept 2024	+/- on previous year
Total Requests for Service	200	275	38%	264	-4%
Aborted Service Requests	85	95	12%	72	-24%
In Hours Service Requests	96	137	43%	137	0%
Out of Hours Service Requests	104	138	33%	127	-80%
Direct RTO	25	28	12%	33	18%
Section 150's Issued	9	4	-55%	7	75%
Total Dogs to Kennels	81	148	83%	152	3%
Total Dogs Rehomed	34	73	114%	65	-11%
Total Dogs Claimed from Kennels	43	59	37%	54	-9%
Total Dogs PTS	0	16	100%	28	75%

The RSPCA's **Animal Kindness Index 2022 Report** discusses the rise in animal abandonments and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. A link to the full report can be found below:

[The Animal Kindness Index 2022 Report | RSPCA - RSPCA - rspca.org.uk](https://www.rspca.org.uk/reports/animal-kindness-index-2022-report)

STRAY DOG SERVICE

The Council has a statutory responsibility under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 as amended by the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005, to deal with stray and lost dogs found in the Borough and has relied on an external provider, SDK Environmental Services Ltd, to discharge its responsibilities.

On 15 April 2025 the Leader, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community & Environment, formally accepted the tender from SDK Environmental Services Ltd for the provision of a stray dog and rehoming service to the London Borough of Hillingdon for a three-year period from 1 July 2025 to 31 March 2028. This followed a competitive tender and procurement process.

The stray and lost dog service operates on a 24-hour, seven days per week basis and includes transportation to licenced kennelling facilities, collection of statutory fines and administrative duties. This includes taking front line calls and issuing statutory notices on behalf of the Council. This contract award provides the Council with a single supplier with sufficient resources, technical knowledge and experience to deliver stray dog and kennelling services in accordance with statutory requirements. It also ensures that the Council complies with its statutory duties to provide a dog warden/stray dog service.

During the last financial year 2024/25 there were a total of 183 total requests for the service. 97 of these requests were in hours whilst 86 were called out of hours. A total of 110 dogs were transported to kennels. 43 of these were rehomed and 43 were returned to their owners. 24 dogs were put to sleep.

SDK's full annual report for 2024/24 can be found at **Appendix D**.

ANIMAL DISEASE & CONTINGENCY

In the UK, The Animal Health Act 1981 is the primary piece of legislation in relation to Animal Health which enables the Minister to make legislation relating to animal health and welfare. It is worth noting that the majority of animal health legislation within the UK derives from European law, and a lot of EU legislation is enabled into UK law via the Animal Health Act 1981.

Along with the Animal Health Act 1981, EU Regulations originally made under the European Communities Act and now implemented through the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, County councils, metropolitan boroughs and unitary authorities in England have a **statutory duty** to work with local communities to help them comply with laws that are aimed at preventing the spread of animal disease and protecting the welfare of animals.

There are a number of agencies including Local Authorities (LA) that have statutory responsibilities under this Act, which include the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). The Primary function for Local Authorities is to carry out enforcement in relation to the Act or other legislation made under the Act.

The Animal Health Act 1981 also requires that, under S50, a local authority shall execute and enforce this act. Also, every order made under it, and S.52, every LA shall appoint as many officers as they think necessary to enforce the Act. It is worth noting that there over 100 different pieces of legislation that relate to Animal Health and the prevention and control of the spread of disease.

Powers

General Animal Health Act powers include Entry (Certain conditions apply), Examine / Inspect / Copy, take photographs, take measurements, take samples / tests, Seizure and removal; to Mark any object or thing, Slaughter animals (Certain conditions apply) Detain and Destroy, and Serve Notice. These powers are some of the most robust contained in UK Legislation and should give an indication of the seriousness of the subject matter. The Animal Health Act also places the requirement that anyone having in their charge an animal affected or suspected of having certain disease at speed must notify that fact to the police, who in turn must notify LA / APHA. The diseases covered by this legal requirement are known as notifiable diseases and include such diseases as FMD, Avian Influenza etc, often known as NOTIFIABLE EXOTIC DISEASES.

It is worth pointing out that, following the 2001 Foot and Mouth outbreak, a pig farmer who ran a pig fattening unit in Heddon on the Wall, Northumberland, was also found guilty of wilfully failing to alert officials when he knew his animals had the disease, causing unnecessary suffering to pigs, feeding his animals unprocessed waste and failing to properly dispose of animal by products. This farm was traced back to the start of the outbreak which then cost the UK economy over £8 billion, which would equate to £16.9 billion today. Foot and mouth disease was suspected at an abattoir in Essex on 19 February 2001 and confirmed the following day. By the time the disease had been eradicated in September 2001, more than six million animals had been slaughtered; over four million for disease control purposes and over two million for welfare reasons. At least 57 farms had already been infected with the virus when the disease was confirmed on 20

February 2001. The disease spread quickly and there were outbreaks in 44 counties, unitary authorities and metropolitan districts and over 2,000 premises were infected. In mid-April 2001, at the height of the crisis, more than 10,000 vets, soldiers, field and support staff, assisted by thousands more working for contractors, were engaged in fighting the disease. Up to 100,000 animals were slaughtered and disposed of each day in what was a massive and complex logistical operation. Tourism suffered the largest financial impact from the outbreak, with visitors to Britain and the countryside deterred by the initial blanket closure of footpaths by local authorities and media images of mass pyres. This highlights the importance of animal disease control as the outbreak affected not only farming, tourism and hospitality but also the food industry and exports.

Controls

The UK has an overarching disease control strategy ([Contingency plan for exotic notifiable diseases of animals in England - GOV.UK](#)) which, through the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, filters down to Local Regions and then to Authorities and the Resilience Forums. Local Authorities must have their own Risk register and Animal Health and Disease should make up an element of this register. Local Authorities have access to Field Officer Guides produced by the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers (ACTSO) which provide guidance in the case of an outbreak. See link for details. [Guidance](#)

Current Situation

The two most prevalent diseases currently are Avian Influenza and Bluetongue. Avian Influenza affects bird populations which include both wild and captive birds and is generally more prevalent during the colder months and is brought in by migrant birds. When avian influenza is confirmed in poultry at an individual premises, a declaration will be served on the premises, and a 3km Protection and 10km Surveillance Zones are declared to prevent the spread of disease beyond the area around the infected farm. Keepers of poultry or other captive birds kept within a Protection Zone or Surveillance Zone (or temporary control zones or other low pathogenic restricted zones) must comply with the biosecurity requirements declared specifically for such zones. This does not remove the obligation to comply with the additional biosecurity measures required by the Prevention Zone Declaration.

In the case of Bluetongue, a 10km **temporary control zone (TCZ)** may be put in place around the affected farms which will restrict all movements of susceptible animals except under veterinary licence.

The London Borough of Hillingdon to date has had no reports of suspected or confirmed cases of Bluetongue, and although the London Borough of Hillingdon did see some cases of Avian Influenza in the Wild Bird population in 2023/2024, there have been no reports of suspected or confirmed cases in captive birds (Poultry Farms)

During the high vector period for both diseases, the London Borough of Hillingdon did write to all known keepers to inform them of movement restrictions or mandatory biosecurity measures. Should an outbreak occur, the London Borough of Hillingdon would be required to enforce measures put in place.

Although the UK is considered to be Rabies Free, Local Authorities should, as with control

strategies for other Animal Diseases, be familiar with the implications that would be involved in an outbreak. This would need to consider safety of staff and vaccinations, collection of infected animals, where the infected animals would be kept as it is unlikely that this would be supported by the Stray Dog collection service provider, and local authorities should identify premises that may be used in advance of a disease situation, and culling and disposal, as well as being required to enforce movement restrictions on animals, and other restrictions placed on the area infected.

Please see the control strategy for further details. [rabies-control-strategy-aug2019a.pdf](#)

Planning and preparedness

The London Borough of Hillingdon has been fortunate over recent years with no significant outbreaks of animal disease. With all animal diseases, there is a level of preparedness that would be required to be able to respond effectively to an outbreak. Currently, the London Borough of Hillingdon may not be sufficiently prepared to respond effectively to an outbreak.

Europe

Between January and March 2025, a number of cases of Foot & Mouth Disease were confirmed in Germany, Slovakia and Hungary. As soon as these cases were confirmed, the UK Government acted quickly to restrict certain products from being brought into the UK. It is also worth noting that, in relation to Bluetongue, the infected midge being blown over from continental Europe is now in the high vector period for the spread of this disease. Cold winters in the UK do help to eliminate infected midge in the UK although it is now expected that there will be some overwintering. As the UK and Europe are now again in more suitable climatic conditions, it may be expected that cases will again rise. It is also thought by experts that the effect on the UK is around 12 months behind the effects in Europe, and this could now result in a far worse scenario for cattle and sheep farmers in the UK this year.

Currently the London Borough of Hillingdon has one officer that actively monitors this area of work due to other demands on the service. Therefore, it is a challenge to carry out more proactive visits or farm inspections to check for matters such as farmed animal welfare, cleansing and disinfection procedures, fallen stock management, compliance with national bio security or housing measures, animal identification requirements or transportation regulations and Bovine Tuberculosis vaccinations. The Licensing Team will respond to any notifications from DEFRA / APHA where intervention is required; in 2024, two on farm joint inspections were carried out with APHA due to concerns raised around cattle movements. On this occasion no non-compliance was found.

Waste process and Green Spaces process for clearing deceased animals

The London Borough of Hillingdon does not currently have a policy for dealing with deceased animals. Although the London Borough of Hillingdon does have land that is leased out for the purpose of grazing animals or keeping horses, it does not have any livestock of its own. In the case of Avian Influenza in the wild bird population, the London Borough of Hillingdon has relied on the assistance of Swan Support, a charitable organisation that has assisted with the collection of deceased wild birds. These were then stored in freezers at Harlington Road Depot, which are emptied when full and taken to Grunden's for incineration.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

Select Committees monitor services that matter to residents and directly engage residents in developing policy proposals and recommendations to Cabinet. As such, Committees seek to improve the way the Council provides services to residents.

Financial Implications

None at this stage.

Legal Implications

None at this stage.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil.