

WRS Joint Board

Date: 24th September 2026

Animal Licensing Information Report

Recommendation | WRS Board Members are asked to note the report

Background

In 2018 [The Animal Welfare \(Licensing of Activities Involving Animals\) \(England\) Regulations 2018](#) under section 13 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 was introduced and in doing so it replaced a number of existing licensing regimes to control the following licensable activities:

- selling animals as pets
- providing or arranging for the provision of boarding for cats or dogs
- hiring out horses
- breeding dogs
- keeping or training animals for exhibition

The new legislation replaced and consolidated four previous Acts; the 1951 Pet Animals Act, 1963 Animal Boarding Establishments Act, 1964 Riding Establishments Act, and 1973 Breeding of Dogs Act; along with the 1925 Performing Animals Act, into a unified licensing regime under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 focuses on welfare and was designed as a risk-based, full cost-recovery framework to enhance minimum standards of welfare across all covered activities.

Each District Council is currently responsible for functions in relation to the licensing and regulation of various animal-related activities. Worcestershire Regulatory Services carries out these functions on behalf of each district council and a proportion of funds towards 1 FTE to carry out this work is allocated in the budget.

In addition to those licences mentioned above Members should note that licences to operate a zoo, to keep a dangerous wild animal or Primates are not included in this legislation, and they remain a separate licence in their own right but all regimes are still delivered by the Licensing team. These are:

- Primate Licences issued under the Animal Welfare (Primate Licences) (England) Regulations 2024
- Dangerous Wild Animal Licences issued under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 197
- Zoo Licences issued under the Zoo Licensing Act 1981.

Although each piece of legislation establishes its own licensing regime, they all share the same core purpose: safeguarding animal welfare. The frameworks are based on shared principles and processes, with consistent standards

and expectations applied across each regime.

Current Licensing Activity

The current number of Animal licences across the districts are set out in the table below:

TABLE A

Licence Type	BDC	MHDC	RBC	WCC	WDC	WFDC	Total
Breeding dogs	0	4	0	3	17	10	34
Hiring out horses	3	7	1		2	4	17
Keeping/training animals for exhibition	8	8	1	1	13	2	33
Providing boarding for cats	9	6	2	1	9	9	36
Providing boarding in kennels for dogs	10	5	0	1	13	6	35
Providing day care for dogs	3	5	0	3	3	2	16
Providing home boarding for dogs	16	11	6	9	24	15	81
Selling animals as pets	6	3	1	2	3	2	17
	55	49	11	20	84	50	269

In 2020 DEFRA introduced a mandatory qualification for all officers who undertake animal licensing inspections. The qualification can take anywhere between 12 – 18 months to complete and requires a combination of theory and practical assessments.

There are currently 4 officers fully qualified with 1 officer awaiting a course commencement date. Unfortunately, two qualified officers left the team last year and therefore for resilience the team are investing in another officer commencing training this year.

Each licence inspection requires a comprehensive visit and check by a qualified officer and on some occasions where the legislation requires a qualified vet must also attend. The DEFRA guidance is comprehensive, and the inspection requirements are very prescriptive meaning at times these inspections can take a considerable length of time to complete.

Alongside, each inspection there is an interim inspection that is booked by the team at various points across the length of the licence. Therefore, the licence inspection numbers shown in the table above are doubled depending on when an interim inspection will be scheduled. The interim inspection will be determined and scheduled by an officer dependent upon on the risk observed and the star rating awarded at the initial inspection.

There are new powers for licensing authorities to vary, suspend and revoke licences where there is non-compliance or it is necessary to protect the welfare of an animal – where previously the only option available to the local authority was prosecution. Officers have varied, suspended and revoked licences where there has been a requirement to do so. When licences have been suspended a list of recommendations are provided to the business which they must comply within a 28 day period.

The table below illustrates the animal licensing inspection trend year on year since the implementation of the new regulations alongside the licence numbers for Zoo inspections and Dangerous Wild Animal (DWA) Licences.

TABLE B

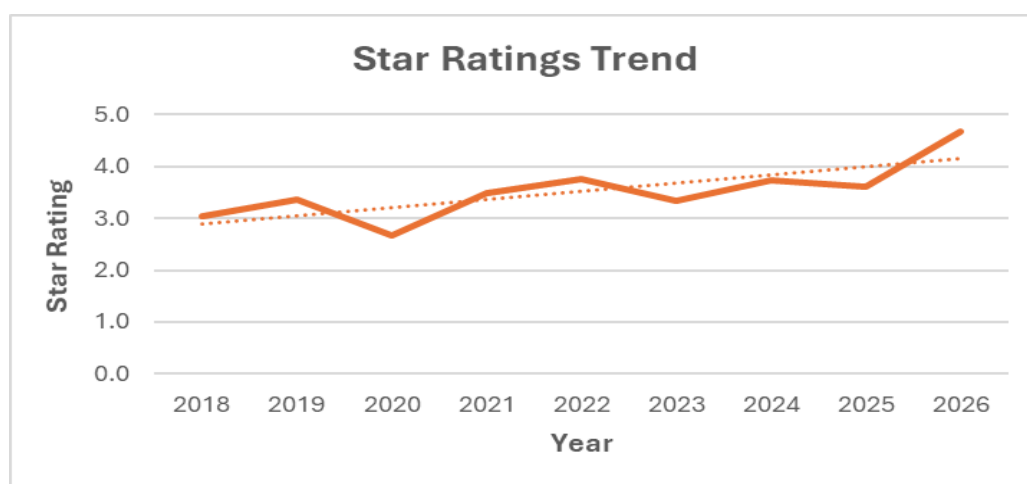
District	Licence Type	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
BDC	ANIACT	37	41	41	43	43	47	44	55
BDC	ZOO	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
MHDC	ANIACT	35	34	39	31	32	35	37	49
RBC	ANIACT	6	7	7	8	8	10	12	11
RBC	DWA	1	1	2	2	0	0	0	0
WC	ANIACT	16	13	13	11	14	14	15	20
WC	DWA	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
WDC	ANIACT	62	58	63	64	64	67	62	84
WDC	DWA	3	3	3	2	1	0	0	0
WDC	ZOO	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
WFDC	ANIACT	29	32	36	38	34	38	44	50
WFDC	ZOO	1		1	1	1	1	1	1

Each zoo licence is inspected annually by an officer. After an initial inspection accompanied by a DEFRA appointed vet a licensing officer carries out an inspection every year and a periodical inspection with a vet on Year 3 and Year 6 of a licence.

For animal licenses Officers have worked collaboratively with licence holders since the implementation of the new regime to increase standards. It has been a huge learning curve for businesses across Worcestershire to not only meet the minimum standards but maintain them due to price rises and cost of living challenges.

Table C outlines the trend across Worcestershire of the Star Ratings provided to businesses since the new regime was implemented from 2018 to today. Businesses are Star rated from 1-5 and this is dependent upon a number of factors including risk, training qualifications/experience and having the correct policies in place.

TABLE C



Proactive Work and Enforcement

The team have worked collaboratively with the intelligence team on a number of Operations for illegal dog breeding using complaints data and intelligence as a source for investigation and in turn have had successful outcomes. The number of complaints and enquiries received into the service for animal licensing is shown in Table D.

TABLE D

District	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026	Grand Total
Bromsgrove	25	37	29	21	40	41	193
Complaint	3	15	17	7	29	25	96
Enquiry	22	22	12	14	11	16	97
Malvern Hills	28	29	34	32	21	35	179
Complaint	12	13	12	14	5	26	82
Enquiry	16	16	22	18	16	9	97
Redditch	19	17	23	15	10	9	93
Complaint	8	8	15	9	3	8	51
Enquiry	11	9	8	6	7	1	42
Worcester	24	31	25	22	20	23	145
Complaint	9	12	11	7	7	14	60
Enquiry	15	19	14	15	13	9	85
Wychavon	56	67	45	77	65	64	374
Complaint	21	28	22	42	35	39	187
Enquiry	35	39	23	35	30	25	187
Wyre Forest	84	59	55	56	49	41	344
Complaint	39	24	33	25	23	21	165
Enquiry	45	35	22	31	26	20	179
Grand Total	236	240	211	223	205	213	1328

The team will prioritise the investigation of these complaints either through analysing risk or through an intelligence gathering operation such as Operation Lisbon (1 and 2) and Operation Braga. These are two Operations where the team have looked at illegal dog breeding across the County. They will also check if the complaint is regarding an existing license holder or an unlicensed business.

For existing licence holders the team will follow the requirements in the legislation and statutory guidance. To date four premises have had their licence suspended as a result of complaints or an interim inspection by the team.

For businesses that are unlicensed in the digital world it is important that any investigations that involve accessing records are done legally and correctly and this can take time. Some investigations may result in a warning letter however others may require the collection of communications data, further intelligence or a warrant from the courts, all of which can take time to pursue.

Joint Communications and press releases with the environmental health team and dog warden service have increased awareness across the County however the service are aware that there is still some more work that is needed on communications to alert the public to come forward when illegal activity is perceived to be happening or seen.

Resources and Cost

**Financial and
Budgetary
Implications**

An analysis has been undertaken of the hours spent on the activities and licensing regimes outlined in this report since the implementation of the 2018 animal licensing regime and the number of FTEs undertaking this area of licensing has significantly increased. The service understands this to be a priority area as outlined in the overall strategic assessment, however this can then pull on resources from other areas of licensing activity. The indication of 2FTE as the baseline has been provided using data collected by WRS colleagues rather than the 1FTE originally put forward to Members in the report in 2017 prior to the team commencing the work required.

Members should also be aware that the cost to the district's by the team training more officers has in turn reduced the need to use Vets for inspecting in the longer term. These costs and savings are outlined below.

Year	Cost
21-22	£23,624
22-23	£19,395
23-24	£35,797
24-25	£13,368
25-26	£7,145

Summary

The team have built up knowledge and expertise in this area of licensing over time and continue to work with colleagues across the country and sit on various National groups as experts in their field. The regulations are very prescriptive as to how matters should be conducted in the granting, suspension, variation, refusal and revocation of a licence, with the welfare of the animals concerned at the very heart of any action to be taken.

The landscape has changed across animal licensing with the introduction of the new regime. The requirements to undertake the interim inspections alongside the proactive enforcement and compliance work with its own legal requirements can provide successful outcomes but not withholding its own challenges for the service.

Contact Points

Kiran Lahel , Licensing and Support Services Team Manager
01562 738067
kiran.lahel@worcsregservices.gov.uk

**Background
Papers**

None