

New research raises concerns over enforcement of welfare rules designed to prevent harmful dog breeding

Wednesday 27 May, 2026

Related Sectors:

Charities & non-profits :: Environment & Nature :: Farming & Animals :: Public Sector & Legal ::

Related Keywords:

Dog :: Animal Welfare :: Animals :: Dogs :: Breeding :: Extreme Breeding :: Report :: Legal :: Law ::

Scan Me:



New research raises concerns over enforcement of welfare rules designed to prevent harmful dog breeding

New research by Naturewatch Foundation and the Legal Advisory Group on Extreme Conformation in Dogs (LAGECDogs), alongside the UK Centre for Animal Law (A-LAW), has raised concerns about whether existing dog breeding rules are being used effectively to protect dogs and puppies from harmful breeding practices.

The report examines how local authorities across England and Scotland apply existing legal rules designed to prevent breeding from dogs whose physical characteristics, state of health or behaviour may compromise the health or welfare of either the dogs themselves or their offspring.

What does the law say?

Licensing rules for commercial dog breeders in England currently state: *"No dog may be kept for breeding if it can reasonably be expected, on the basis of its genotype, phenotype or state of health, that breeding from it could have a detrimental effect on its health or welfare or the health or welfare of its offspring."*

A similar rule exists in Scotland.

These provisions were introduced to help tackle harmful breeding practices linked to inherited diseases and extreme conformations, including very short muzzles, excessive skin folds and other exaggerated physical features that can severely affect dogs' quality of life.

New findings

Using Freedom of Information requests sent to 326 local authorities, the research found that although around 2,390 licensed dog breeders were operating across England and Scotland in 2025, recorded findings of non-compliance with these welfare protections were strikingly rare.

In England, local authorities reported only 31 cases of non-compliance between 2018 and 2025, resulting in:

? 17 licence refusals

? six licence variations

? two suspensions

? two prosecutions

In Scotland, no cases of non-compliance were reported.

The findings come despite the continued popularity of dogs bred with extreme physical characteristics associated with serious health and welfare concerns such as breathing issues, skin problems, spinal abnormalities, birthing difficulties and eye disorders.

Inconsistency across councils

The report found significant variation in how local authorities assess compliance and apply the law.

Some councils described comprehensive inspections involving referral to veterinary expertise, checks of health testing records, assessments of dogs on site and broader welfare checks. However, others provided only general descriptions or no clear explanation of how compliance is assessed in practice.

The report also warns that welfare concerns may be going unidentified or unrecorded. In some cases, local authorities reportedly excluded individual dogs from breeding licences rather than formally recording

this as a breach of the regulations.

Recommendations

To improve protection for dogs and puppies, the report recommends:

- ? clearer guidance for breeders and inspectors about these rules
- ? greater emphasis on holistic welfare assessments during inspections
- ? improved training and support for licensing officers
- ? clearer guidance on the role of veterinarians during inspections, and
- ? further research into how welfare assessments are carried out by local authorities

The report examines use of the existing rules, rather than proposing substantive changes to the law, which may yet be needed.

The report has been shared with the UK and Scottish Governments, local authorities, veterinary bodies and animal welfare organisations to help inform future improvements to dog breeding regulation and enforcement.

Natalie Harney, Campaign Manager at Naturewatch Foundation and report co-author, said:

"The findings of this report confirm, as many have long suspected, that legal rules designed to prevent harmful breeding decisions are not being used to their full potential. This evidence can now be used to better support local authorities and licensees, and inform future dog breeding policy development, with the overall aim of improving the health and welfare of dogs."

Helena Howe, Senior Lecturer in Law at Exeter University, report co-author and LAGECDogs Chair, said:

"We believe there is a need for clearer statutory guidance directed at both licensing authorities and breeders about licence conditions. There should be greater emphasis on inspectors making an holistic assessment and they should have improved training and support about the animal welfare aims and application of these licence conditions."

The full report is available at <https://naturewatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Protecting-dogs-from-g>

ENDS

Company Contact:

—

Naturewatch Foundation

T. +44 (0)1242 252871

E. info@naturewatch.org

W. <https://www.naturewatch.org>

Additional Contact(s):

Sarah Carr, CEO

sarah@naturewatch.org

[View Online](#)

Newsroom: Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:

<https://www.naturewatch-foundation.pressat.co.uk>