

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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OFFICIAL REPORT

Seventh Delegated Legislation Committee

DRAFT ANIMAL WELFARE (LICENSING OF  
ACTIVITIES INVOLVING ANIMALS) (ENGLAND)  
REGULATIONS 2018

*Tuesday 20 March 2018*

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**The Committee consisted of the following Members:**

*Chair:* ALBERT OWEN

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| † Badenoch, Mrs Kemi ( <i>Saffron Walden</i> ) (Con)                      | † McMorris, Anna ( <i>Cardiff North</i> ) (Lab)                       |
| † Davies, Mims ( <i>Eastleigh</i> ) (Con)                                 | † Menzies, Mark ( <i>Fylde</i> ) (Con)                                |
| † Debbonaire, Thangam ( <i>Bristol West</i> ) (Lab)                       | † Morris, James ( <i>Halesowen and Rowley Regis</i> ) (Con)           |
| † Eustice, George ( <i>Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food</i> ) | † Pollard, Luke ( <i>Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport</i> ) (Lab/Co-op) |
| † George, Ruth ( <i>High Peak</i> ) (Lab)                                 | † Pow, Rebecca ( <i>Taunton Deane</i> ) (Con)                         |
| † Henderson, Gordon ( <i>Sittingbourne and Sheppey</i> ) (Con)            | Sheerman, Mr Barry ( <i>Huddersfield</i> ) (Lab/Co-op)                |
| † Keegan, Gillian ( <i>Chichester</i> ) (Con)                             | † Turley, Anna ( <i>Redcar</i> ) (Lab/Co-op)                          |
| † Latham, Mrs Pauline ( <i>Mid Derbyshire</i> ) (Con)                     | Sarah Rees, <i>Committee Clerk</i>                                    |
| † Lynch, Holly ( <i>Halifax</i> ) (Lab)                                   |   |
| McCarthy, Kerry ( <i>Bristol East</i> ) (Lab)                             | † <b>attended the Committee</b>                                       |

# Seventh Delegated Legislation Committee

Tuesday 20 March 2018

(Afternoon)

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

## Draft Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018

2.30 pm

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the draft Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018.

I am pleased to open this debate on an important set of regulations introducing an updated system of local authority licensing of activities involving animals in England. These regulations meet the Government's manifesto commitment to continuing its review and reform of the pet licensing controls and, specifically, to updating the licensing system for dog breeding, pet sales, riding establishments and animal boarding establishments. They also modernise a system for animal exhibits.

The licensing and registration system that covers these five animal activities is outdated and complex. The activities are regulated under a number of different pieces of legislation: the Performing Animals (Regulation) Act 1925, the Pet Animals Act 1951, the Animal Boarding Establishments Act 1963, the Riding Establishments Act 1964, the Breeding of Dogs Acts 1973 and 1991 and the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999. They will be repealed and replaced with new regulations that consolidate and update the requirements set out in each of the Acts in one consistent licensing scheme. This new licensing will have more streamlined processes of application, inspection and enforcement, reducing the burden on local authorities and businesses while improving consistency of application across the country.

One of the key issues with the licensing system is that the animal welfare standards with which businesses are required to comply have not been updated for many years. The schedules to the new regulations include detailed animal welfare standards for each activity. We have worked closely with stakeholders from the industry, animal welfare organisations, local authorities and veterinary bodies in drafting these standards and we are grateful for their support—in particular the Canine and Feline Sector Group and the Equine Sector Council for helping to co-ordinate this work. These new standards will ensure that anyone who receives a licence for dog breeding, selling pets, boarding dogs and cats, hiring out horses or keeping or training animals for exhibit will need to meet these new minimum welfare standards. This should help drive up animal welfare standards across all of these sectors.

Many people and organisations have been calling for more restrictions to be placed on the breeding and selling of dogs in particular, where it is felt there are unscrupulous businesses that breed dogs in poor conditions

for maximum profit. The regulations address this in a number of ways. First, we are making changes to the definition of dog breeding, to ensure the regulations capture both large-scale dog breeders as well as smaller-scale dog breeding businesses. Under the new regulations, anyone who is in the business of breeding and selling dogs will need a licence. In addition, breeders who are not classed as a business will also need a licence if they breed three or more litters a year and sell any of them. Overall, this will ensure that more breeders are captured under the regulations and will need to comply with the high animal welfare requirements set out within them, while also ensuring that we crack down on unregulated backstreet breeding.

Secondly, it is important to acknowledge the sad fact that many unsuspecting potential buyers are providing a lucrative market for rogue dog breeders and animal dealers who work illegally, outside the licensing system. Therefore, the regulations include a number of measures that will help consumers identify these rogue traders and make more informed decisions when purchasing an animal.

**Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab):** On that point, can the Minister confirm whether unlicensed breeders, specifically those falling below the threshold for licensing, will still be able to sell puppies to pet shops and dealers if they are under eight weeks of age?

**George Eustice:** The situation described by the hon. Lady, as I outlined, would be captured. Under HMRC's badges of trade, which define what trade is, anyone breeding for the purpose of selling to pet shops would be covered by these regulations, even if they were breeding fewer than three litters a year.

The regulations include a number of measures that will help consumers identify these rogue traders and make more informed decisions when purchasing an animal. Licence holders are required to publish their licence number on all adverts, including online adverts, so that consumers can check with the relevant local authority that it is a legitimate business. All licensed businesses will also receive a risk rating—from one to five stars—based on their welfare standards and compliance record. That is a similar system to the one used in food hygiene rating schemes. For puppies, there is an additional requirement that any sale be completed at the premises where the puppy was bred to make sure that the purchaser sees the puppy and the conditions in which it has been kept before making the final purchase. All licensed pet sellers are also required to provide purchasers with information about how to care for the animal they are buying.

These measures will ensure that consumers can make more informed decisions when buying an animal, and are better able to care for it once they have taken it home. This is particularly important for some of the more exotic species, such as reptiles, which are becoming more common as pets these days.

Many people are concerned about the increase in the online sale of pets. Dating as it does from 1951, the current legislation is not clear on whether these businesses require a licence. The legal position is that they already do. However, as a result of the lack of clarity, enforcement is inconsistent across the country. Under the new regulations,

the issue is put beyond doubt: all commercial sales require a licence, including those that take place online. All these businesses will have to comply with the minimum welfare standards set out in the regulations. These measures will ensure that the licensing system is consistent and fit for purpose in this modern age.

**Ruth George:** The Minister is outlining an excellent procedure for the star rating and the licensing of online, as well as other, sales, but that will require considerable enforcement and monitoring by local authorities. What resources are being given to local authorities to perform all these tasks?

**George Eustice:** Local authorities can recover the full cost of their licensing regime through the price of the licence that they issue. Resourcing is not a problem; they can go for full cost recovery and the regulations provide for that.

I should point out that the licensing system is run by local authorities and, as I said, funded by full cost recovery—the hon. Lady got there just before I reached that point—so there is no financial burden on local authorities. Licences can also be issued at any point in the calendar year, which will help to spread the workload across the year. The maximum licence length that can be issued is increased from the current one to three years, with longer licences going to businesses with earned recognition.

This earned recognition will be based on a combination of past history of compliance and the animal welfare standards adopted by the business. Businesses with high animal welfare standards and high historical levels of compliance, or those associated with a body accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service—such as the Kennel Club’s assured breeder scheme—will be able to achieve the maximum three-year licence, leading to less frequent inspections and a lower fee. They will also achieve a five-star rating to demonstrate their high quality to consumers.

The risk-based system should reduce the workload for local authorities, allowing them to spend more time on enforcement of unlicensed and less compliant businesses. That will also reduce the burden on good businesses and therefore provide an incentive for businesses to improve welfare standards.

We recognise that the implementation of these regulations will be crucial to their success and so local authority inspectors will be required to undertake specific training on licensing and inspection. That will ensure that they are suitably qualified to undertake inspections for all the animal activities covered by the regulations. The regulations have been drafted in consultation with stakeholders from industry, animal welfare organisations, local authorities and veterinary bodies, and we are grateful for all the assistance they have offered. The regulations are proportionate and targeted and will help improve animal welfare across a number of sectors. I therefore commend them to the Committee.

2.40 pm

**Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab):** May I join the Minister in saying what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen? I am grateful to him for his opening explanation. We are in agreement that the

statutory instrument is a step in the right direction, but we will take this opportunity to seek clarification on certain areas and outline reservations that this is a missed opportunity to go further in certain other directions.

There are 2,300 licensed pet shops, 650 licensed dog breeders, 1,800 licensed riding establishments and 6,300 licensed animal boarding establishments in England alone. That is why guaranteeing the welfare of the animals within the system presents such a big challenge for local authorities. Collectively, these businesses make up the fourth largest group of establishments requiring licences issued by local authorities after premises, taxis and gambling establishments. We welcome the opportunity to update the existing legislation, which is contained predominantly within five Acts, as the Minister said, that date back as far as 1925. They are therefore certainly in need of an update.

It is important to account for changes within the sector, new and varied routes to market, updated guidance on animal welfare and changing social attitudes but, perhaps most importantly, it is important to clamp down on those who go beyond poor animal welfare and seek to exploit animals for the purposes of criminal activity and gain. With that in mind, we are pleased to see that under the regulations puppy sales are required to be completed in the presence of the new owner and with the puppy shown with its mother. That is to prevent online sales, which have increased dramatically in recent years and have prevented the buyer from seeing the animal first.

However, the regulations do not prevent the third-party sale of puppies, which is a massive missed opportunity. I heard the Minister’s comments earlier, but the Labour party outlined the pledge in our 2017 manifesto, and we reiterated it in our recent animal welfare plan, which has been endorsed by the League Against Cruel Sports, Compassion in World Farming and the World Wide Fund for Nature. Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals support calls for a ban on the third-party sale of puppies, so why stop short of delivering on that? It would address the issues much more comprehensively than the proposals before us today.

We also want to stress in the strongest possible terms that with the best will in the world, the fewer numbers of staff at cash-strapped local authorities cannot perpetually become experts in the increasing number of fields for which we are asking them to take responsibility. Whether it is environmental health inspectors or licensing officers, when I follow up on casework I am increasingly being told, “The person who knew about that topic does not work here anymore, and I am afraid we haven’t got anyone else.”

Minimum standards are already outlined in guidance, but the Government’s own findings suggest that fewer than one in three local authorities use the guidance when carrying out inspections, and I would imagine that that is a resourcing and time issue as much as anything else.

**Ruth George:** Regarding the resourcing of local authorities, obviously they have to provide the personnel to start with. To monitor the licensing and enforcement, they have to provide up-front training. If they are doing the enforcement side of it, that does not pay as well as

[Ruth George]

the licences themselves. Does my hon. Friend share my concern that if there is a lot of enforcement, that could raise the level of licence fees to a disproportionate level for breeders who are prepared to pay for them?

**Holly Lynch:** My hon. Friend made a couple of key points there. I will come on to talk in detail about the issues she raised, and I hope we will hear the Minister respond to those points, which she made powerfully.

Thinking about resourcing, how do the Government propose to overcome some of the challenges through the new regulations? The impact assessment admits that local authorities may struggle to deliver the new regulations—that was my hon. Friend’s concern—that will be brought into force by 1 October this year. The impact assessment accepts that under this Government, authorities are

“unlikely to acquire additional resource”.

Instead it suggests that to meet demand, authorities may have to reprioritise existing activities. Will the Minister be clear about what local authorities should reprioritise? Is it licences for selling alcohol, taxis, gambling, houses in multiple occupation or tattoo parlours? We all appreciate that that is incredibly important work.

To get down to the detail, the impact assessment assumes a one-off familiarisation cost of two hours’ work per local authority. That is one hour for a staff member to understand the new guidance and a further hour to disseminate that information to other staff members, with a combined national cost to 356 local authorities of just under £11,500. I can only take from that information that one licensing officer will get the training and then is expected to educate the other members of the team. However, the impact assessment specifically says “disseminate” the information. The impact assessment accounts for two hours for one person, which does not allocate a time or cost for the rest of the team to even read the information disseminated, or take part in any internal training, during working hours. With that in mind I will give the Government the benefit of the doubt, and suggest that this impact assessment is just lazy, and provides an inadequate assessment of what the cost would be to get this right in the way that I am sure the Minister intended—because the alternative is that it exposes a fundamental lack of commitment to the training that will be intrinsic to delivering the regulations, and improving animal welfare. I am sure that that is not the case.

We are also keen to better understand how breaches of licence conditions will be penalised—which comes back to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak—and what the consequences would be for those seeking to obstruct a licensing officer. Three years is a significant period of time for those establishments that have a good inspection and are rewarded with a lengthy inspection-free period, based on the assessment of risk. However, if a member of the public or an employee, for example, raised concerns with the local authority that changes had occurred and animal welfare had declined in that period, would that mean that further inspections could be brought forward, as we hope would be the case? I would be grateful if the Minister can confirm that today.

We would also like to put on record our regret that the threshold for these new regulations is three litters per annum, which is still an intensive breeding regime for a dog. Why did the Minister draw the line at three litters and not reduce the number to two per year, or even one, as called for by organisations such as the Dogs Trust?

We firmly believe that these measures are a step in the right direction, but I hope that the Minister will offer us some clarity on the issues that I have raised. In particular, can he revisit the training element of these new regulations, as that will be absolutely key if the measures are to be effective? I would be grateful for his assurances that the impact assessment will be reconsidered and that the training will be delivered properly.

2.47 pm

**Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I am sure that all Members here share my desire to see the highest possible standards of animal welfare in the UK. Indeed, as a dog owner myself, and someone who has pushed recently for changes in legislation on animal cruelty, this policy area is close to my heart, and I am glad of the opportunity to speak briefly on this topic today.

Every week, I receive letters and emails from constituents concerned about the welfare of animals. We are a country of animal lovers and the strength of feeling on this issue is huge. When cases of the mistreatment or abuse of defenceless animals come to light, they are emotive and shocking, and people are right to ask what can be done to prevent similar cases occurring in the future. These cases remind us that Parliament has a key role in keeping animals safe in England, and that will be true regardless of the outcomes of negotiations on leaving the European Union.

We must stay one step ahead of these abusive practices by looking at ways that we can raise standards. There is no room for complacency, and where there is evidence of wrongdoing occurring within the system, and there is scope to tighten legislation, then it must be addressed. Our understanding of the behaviour and needs of animals is constantly changing too, and it is good to see this instrument attempt to update regulations to reflect that. It shows that we must always have this issue on our minds, and we can always do better. I am pleased to see that this instrument has been brought forward after a successful public consultation and has taken into account quality, evidence-based submissions on how the current licensing arrangements can be improved. We have some of the best animal welfare charities in the world, and I am very proud of the work that Dogs Trust, the RSPCA, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, and others have done to feed into this work.

I am satisfied that there are a number of sensible and timely reforms to the system within this instrument, and many measures that are non-controversial, and ought to be non-partisan. There are however some concerns. This instrument brings welcome new standards of good practice and addresses concerns around problem areas. I will wait to see the results before cheerleading, but it is welcome that the Government have made specific reference to the rise of online sales of pets, where there is a danger, as with all online activity, that regulation cannot keep up with fast-moving trends. There has been much

work by animal welfare organisations and others through the Pet Advertising Advisory Group to improve the standards of animals advertised for sale via online websites. It is a positive step forward that this instrument will now enshrine that work in law, making it applicable to all licensed individuals wishing to sell their pets in this way, regardless of the platform that they use.

I would like to highlight a point mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Halifax and for High Peak, which is that these regulations must not lead to overworked local authorities. The impact on public confidence in the licensing process and on the ability to deliver licensing will be severe. The current application process for licensing puts pressure on businesses and local authorities by limiting licences to a calendar-year framework. Therefore the introduction of licences issued for a fixed term, set at any point in the year, is an eminently sensible measure that will prevent a backlog of inspections and paperwork at the end of the year. Local authorities are already under strained financial pressure to deliver services as it is, and working to ease this pressure is an important part of making the system work.

I believe that the inclusion of an earned recognition principle into the licensing system is a good step to incentivising good behaviour, and can potentially alleviate burdens on local authority time. However, we must be careful that this is a measure to drive up standards, and is not used to circumvent proper inspections when local authorities are under particularly difficult time and financial constraints.

I will support this instrument, but I want to finish by asking the Government questions, some of which I know my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax has mentioned before. How can we be sure that local authorities are sufficiently ready for the implementation of these regulations before the 1 October deadline? What steps will the Government take to support local authorities struggling with the implementation? Has there been any consideration of setting up a national unit of inspectors that could alleviate the burden on local authorities, and also help to provide much-needed animal welfare standards expertise for inspections?

2.51 pm

**George Eustice:** I am grateful for the supportive comments from both hon. Ladies who have made a contribution to the general approach we are taking. They have raised some specific issues that I will try to address.

The shadow Minister raised the point of third party sales. I hope that she is aware that on 8 February 2018 we issued a call for evidence on this matter. It has been discussed a little bit in the last few years as we have progressed these issues. The general view that we have taken is that if we can tighten up on internet sales and make it clear that people selling online are registered pet shops and pet dealers and therefore require a licence, it will go some way to addressing these challenges, but we are aware that a number of organisations have made and continue to make representations on third party sales, and that is why we have a call for evidence out on this at the moment. We will have many representations on that so we are addressing and dealing with that point through that approach.

The hon. Member for Halifax also mentioned resourcing. As I explained at the start, local authorities can recover the cost of both the enforcement and the licensing regime through the cost of the licence that they issue. We are now working closely with local authorities to put together guidance to help to inform people of the length and scale of the charges that would probably be imposed for licences of different lengths, and they will be able to recover all of their costs through the licence cost.

**Anna McMorrin** (Cardiff North) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that deciding to set the licensing threshold for dog breeders at one or two litters would bring more breeders on to the radar in terms of licensing?

**George Eustice:** If it is okay with the hon. Lady, I will return to the issue of the threshold set on the number of puppies. Even as a backbencher from 2011, I looked closely at this issue over a number of years, and I think we have arrived at the right place, but I will return to that.

I will say a little bit more about resourcing. As the hon. Member for Redcar correctly pointed out, by making sure that the licence can start in any month of the year—so it is a 12-month licence, not a calendar year licence—we spread the workload for local authorities. With the ability to have earned recognition for the best performing establishments of up to three years, we will also therefore reduce the workload in that regard. The combination of the ability to recover the cost of the licence—the regulation provides for that—and the evening out of the workload will help local authorities.

The shadow Minister raised the point about the consistency of application. We recognise that this has been a bit patchy in the past. It varies from local authority to local authority. That is why we will address that by requiring, for the first time, training of those carrying out the licensing. That will address that particular concern.

**Holly Lynch:** I am grateful for the opportunity to make an intervention. Returning to the impact assessment, that training is for just one member of staff. While there is a responsibility on that member of staff to then disseminate information within the team, there is no accounting of time or cost for people to be involved in that training, to listen to and digest it, and to be informed when they are then going about their business. Is that an error within the impact assessment or is that intentional?

**George Eustice:** I was going to move on to that. The hon. Lady raises the issue of familiarisation. These regulations consolidate a number of other existing licensing regimes. So it is not as though we are starting from scratch. All local authorities will have people who have some familiarity with the existing regulations. We are changing, improving and consolidating it, but the starting point is that they are familiar with the regulations that exist today. The second point is that when I was handling this part of the portfolio—it is now with my noble Friend Lord Gardiner—in 2015, we were actively engaged in discussing this issue with local authorities and we have been ever since. To get to the stage we are at today there has been an enormous amount of dialogue with local authorities on these regulations and the approach we are taking. It is an approach that they have supported and, in effect, co-designed with us.

**Ruth George:** Local authorities are already under enormous pressure enforcing the existing regulations. In my area of High Peak, we have not seen a single prosecution for raptor death in the last year and raptors have been reduced from 15 pairs down to one. This is going on, but the law is not being enforced, because enforcement and prosecution in particular take up a vast amount of time and resources that local authorities simply do not have.

**George Eustice:** The hon. Lady is taking us into a slightly different area, which is wildlife crime and persecution of raptors, but she will be aware that we have the national wildlife crime unit, which also addresses this particular issue. It is a challenge. However, as I have said a number of times, local authorities can recover the costs of running this licensing regime and the regulations have provided for that.

The shadow Minister raised an important point, particularly given that there could be a longer licence, what are the remedies if there is a breach of the licence? That is an important point because, somewhat astonishingly, the existing regulations—with the exception of the Performing Animals (Regulation) Act 1925—have no provision at all to revoke the licence. It is an annual licence and the remedy effectively was that it would not be renewed if there was a breach. We do not think that is sufficient or acceptable. In a new addition we have brought in, these regulations enable local authorities to revoke and suspend licences where a breach has occurred. The establishments affected will have the ability to appeal, if they wish, to a first-tier tribunal, so we would make provision for an appeals process. This is the first time that local authorities will have the power to revoke or suspend licences. That is new. It gives us the confidence to grant those longer-term licences where operators have demonstrated a high degree of compliance and a commitment to high-level animal welfare.

**Holly Lynch:** May I just query, in those circumstances where a licence is revoked, for example for a dog breeder, what would happen to the animals within their care?

**George Eustice:** In a situation such as that, the animal welfare officers at local authorities already have the power to intervene, to take those animals away and find a way to re-home them, probably with rescue charities, other breeders or other establishments that retain a licence. They have the powers to facilitate that already. On the issue of the threshold of the number of puppies, as I said earlier, I looked at this in depth as a Back Bencher and it might be worth dwelling briefly on the history. Until, I think, 1999, if someone bred more than two litters—that is, three litters or more, the same as we are proposing now—they required a licence. As a result of a debate that took place in the House of Commons regarding concerns over commercial, large-scale puppy farms, a direction was given that resources should be focused on large-scale puppy farms rather than smaller breeders.

As a result, a Home Office circular was sent out, in effect giving guidance to local authorities that they should follow a threshold of five litters or more. I am not going to make a political point; that took place under the last Labour Government, but it was done with good intentions, to try to target resources where the greatest concern lay, as Parliament saw it in those days, which was large-scale puppy farms.

What we have subsequently found, particularly in the last decade, is a worrying growth in what I would term backstreet breeders, particularly people breeding status dogs. Those are people who are not really fit to raise dogs or to look after puppies. To make it worse, they often raise them, and try to train them, to be aggressive. There has been a worrying trend of status dogs, which started in around 2005 and has run for the last decade. The change we are making will capture those people again, by effectively reinstating the position as it was until 1999.

There is always an argument that we could go further, but we can review this. The regulations will be reviewed every five years, and if the feeling of the House at that time is that there is a reason to change the threshold again—maybe putting it up or down; it tends to move quite often—there will be an opportunity to do so at that point. Having looked at this, to put the position back as it was and to put it back in line with legislation introduced by the Welsh Government, which also has a threshold of three litters or more, is right.

The final thing I would say is that, notwithstanding the second criterion of three litters or more as a threshold, if somebody were breeding fewer than that but were doing so commercially and regularly selling those puppies, they would still be captured by the need to have a licence under the badges of trade criterion, which is included in the legislation.

**Anna McMorrin:** Has a minimum staff-to-dog ratio for breeders been put into any of this legislation?

**George Eustice:** It would test my skills to find the correct location. I am not sure that there is a specific staff-to-dog ratio, but if the hon. Lady looks in the schedules of the statutory instrument, she will see that when it comes to both pet shop and dog breeding establishments there are detailed statutory codes that people must follow. It sets out things about the amount of social contact there must be with dogs, the feeding regime, the availability of water and bedding, and socialisation of the dogs. That is all set out in some detail through the new statutory code that we have worked up with the industry.

**Anna McMorrin:** I thank the Minister for giving way again. I will just state that in the Welsh Government's legislation there is a minimum staff-to-dog ratio of 1:20. I see he has a piece of paper.

**George Eustice:** My officials have very helpfully helped me out. The specific issue of a ratio is not in the regulations. Lots of other things are, and I commend them to hon. Members, because we have worked them up with the industry. The ratio of staff to dogs will be contained in and addressed through the guidance that goes to local authorities alongside the regulations.

I will briefly conclude by addressing some of the points raised by the hon. Member for Redcar; I know she has introduced legislation, through a private Member's Bill, to address some of these issues. I welcome what she said about earned recognition, which was something I was always keen to support because we know there has been quite patchy application of the regulations by local authorities. My view was always that if we had a way of recognising those who are signed up to UKAS-accredited schemes or who demonstrate strong compliance,

it frees up the time of local authorities to target the people we really want to hit—those who are trying to avoid or evade the licensing regime, and about whom we have concerns.

The hon. Lady asked whether local authorities are ready for this. The commencement date is 1 October. I believe they are ready, because, as I said earlier, we have been talking about this for quite some time. We first started engaging with local authorities on the emerging regulations in 2015 and they have been involved in their co-design. They will welcome the changes, because they will enable them to issue longer licences and to spread their workload across the year. They are ready for it and they have had lots of time to prepare. We will also issue guidance and work with them over the next six months to ensure that they are ready.

Finally, the hon. Lady asked whether there should be a national unit dedicated to enforcement. We looked at that, but we concluded that it would be the wrong way to go. Licensing regimes have traditionally been run by local authorities. We want to improve the way they are run and the consistency of enforcement, which is why we will have training. We want to enable them to take a risk-based approach to their licensing regime. We want them to be able to recover their costs so that they can do the job effectively. It is right, however, that local authorities, with local people on the ground, run this kind of licensing regime.

**Anna McMorrin** *rose*—

**The Chair:** You have missed the opportunity, unless the Minister is feeling over-generous and has not quite finished. Does he wish to take an intervention?

**George Eustice:** I will, out of kindness, given that the issue is dear to my heart.

**Anna McMorrin:** I am grateful to the Minister for taking a final intervention. Could he clarify how the public will be able to validate a seller's licence? Will there be a publicly accessible list of all licensed breeders and sellers?

**The Chair:** I call the Minister to respond and conclude.

**George Eustice:** There will not be a publicly available list as such, but, as I said, those who are selling animals will be required to display their licence number on their websites. Our view is that it should be a risk-based approach. If someone has concerns about the validity of a particular licence and believes that fraudulent behaviour is happening, they should be able to raise that with their local authority.

I was always supportive of requiring licence numbers to be stated on websites and on online adverts because it gives local authorities an easy surveillance tool to check whether people who claim to be in Sheffield and to have a licence in Sheffield actually have such a licence. It is an easy way for people to self-volunteer, and it makes enforcement by local authorities very easy. On that final point, we have had a constructive and useful debate, and I commend these regulations to the Committee.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the Committee has considered the draft Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018.

3.7 pm

*Committee rose.*

