

Dog Warden Services: Kennelling Costs, Service Provision, and the Impact of XL Bully Legislation

To: all UK authorities

To: All UK Local Authorities

1 Purpose of the Briefing

APSE conducted a survey on dog warden service provision, kennelling arrangements and associated costs, together with the early operational impacts of XL Bully legislation. The survey was based on returns from UK local authorities for the 2025.

To supplement the survey findings, a roundtable discussion was held to gather further insight into the challenges local authorities are facing and the approaches being adopted to address these issues.

This briefing provides an overview of the survey results and summarises the key points raised at the roundtable session held on **15 April 2026**.

2 Background

On **31 October 2023**, the UK Government formally banned the XL Bully breed following a rise in serious attacks involving these dogs. The breed is now classified under the **Dangerous Dogs Act 1991**, which prohibits the ownership, breeding and sale of certain dog breeds deemed dangerous.

The new legislation places additional requirements on owners, including:

- Certification of Exemption
- Neutering
- Public safety measures
- Insurance

The changes have significant legal implications, prohibiting the sale, breeding and transfer of ownership of XL Bully dogs. Owners must also ensure that their dogs do not stray or become abandoned.

Applications for new Certificates of Exemption have closed, and any new exemptions can now only be authorised by a court order.

From **5 December 2024**, provisions were introduced to allow the transfer of ownership of an exempted XL Bully dog where the original owner dies or becomes seriously ill. This amendment provides a legal pathway to ensure continuity of responsible ownership.

To better understand how these legislative changes are impacting local authorities, APSE undertook a survey of member authorities in early 2026. The survey focused on:

- Service delivery models
- Kennelling provision and associated costs
- Levels of stray dog activity
- Reclaiming and rehoming outcomes
- The impact of XL Bully legislation and wider cost-of-living pressures

Responses were received from authorities across **England, Scotland and Wales**.

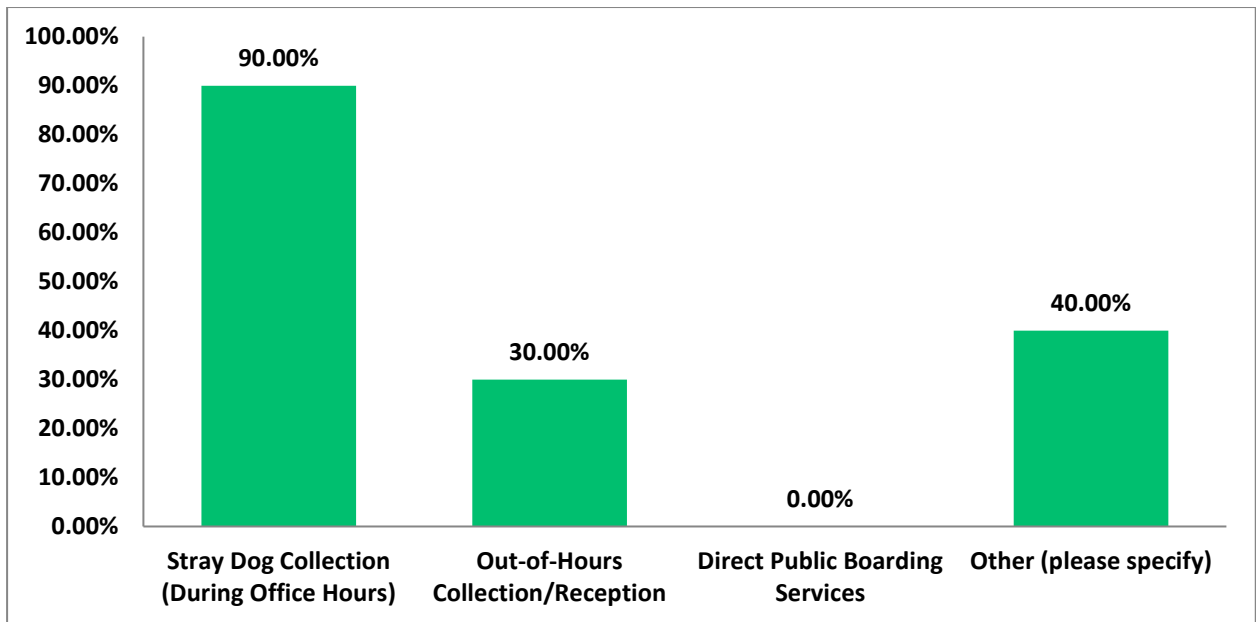
3 Key Findings from the survey

3.1 Service Provision

The majority of respondents, 70% advise that they provide a kennel and stray dog service.

3.2 What services does your council's dog warden team offer?

The survey sought to gain an understanding of what services council's dog warden teams offer, and the graph below provides an overview of the responses received.

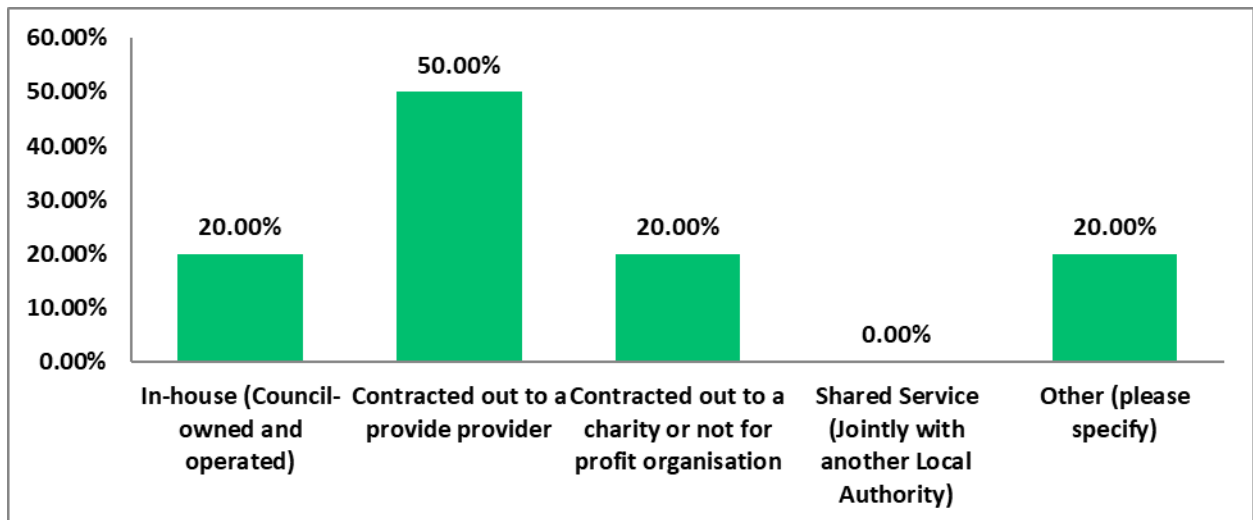


The vast majority of respondents (90%) report that they offer stray dog collection during office hours, while only 30% provide an out-of-hours service, 30% advise that an out of hours collection / reception facility was provided. None of the responding authorities reported providing direct public boarding services.

Many councils reported additional functions delivered by dog wardens, including animal welfare investigations, microchipping, behavioural advice and partnership working with vets and charities.

3.3 Kenneling Delivery Models

To establish how the kenneling service is delivered by the council, the survey asked respondents to advise on their approach. The graph below outlines the responses received.



The data shows that kennelling provision is most commonly contracted out to private providers (50%). 20% of authorities operate in-house kennels, while a further 20% rely on charitable or not-for-profit organisations.

Several authorities reported informal or hybrid arrangements rather than formal contracts, highlighting flexibility but also potential risk.

3.4 Charges and Costs

The survey asked respondents to specify what charges and costs they had in place for 2025; it is clear from the responses that statutory fines varied significantly, ranging from £25 to £100

The administration, handling or collection fees showed wide variation, from £15 up to £163.50, often with reduced rates for residents on benefits.

The kennelling fees per 24-hour period ranged from £11.40 to £35.40, and the out-of-hours surcharges were uncommon but, where applied, were substantial at approximately £150–£156 per dog.

The variations in charges and costs could be attributed to the delivery model that a council has adopted, with the cost and charges being applied at a rate that covers the cost of providing the provision.

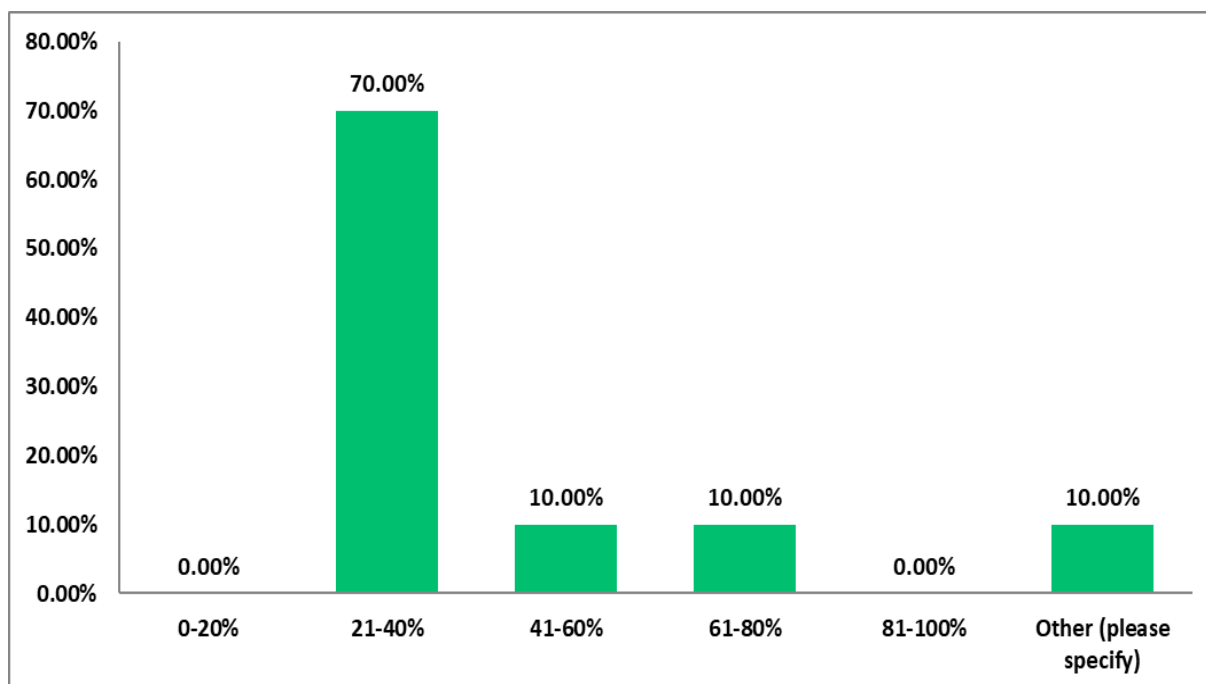
3.5 Stray Dog Activity

To gain an understanding of stray dogs and the reclaim rates, the survey asked a range of questions to ascertain this activity.

The data shows that the number of stray dogs collected in 2025 varied widely, from as few as 12 to over 680 dogs per authority.

3.5.1 Dogs reclaimed by their owner

The graph below highlights the responses to the question regarding the percent of dogs reclaimed by their owners



Most councils reported reclaim rates of 21–40%, indicating that the majority of dogs are not reunited with owners.

Of the dogs not reclaimed, outcomes were more positive, with over half of authorities rehoming or transferring between 61–100% of animals to rescue organisations.

3.6 Impact of XL Bully Legislation

80% of authorities reported that XL Bully types account for less than 20% of current dog intake and most respondents indicated that the overall reclaiming and rehoming rates have stayed broadly the same since the legislation was introduced.

Several authorities highlighted that responsibility for XL Bully enforcement largely sits with the police, limiting direct impact on council dog warden services.

3.7 Cost-of-Living Pressures

The survey asked respondents for their comments in relation to the issues, and these were noted as follows: -

- Cost-of-living pressures have led to increased abandonment, particularly of older dogs.
- Authorities are experiencing higher veterinary bills and reduced reclaim rates.
- Staff wellbeing and service capacity have been affected, with respondents noting limited government guidance or support, particularly in relation to XL Bully enforcement.

4 Summary of the APSE Roundtable

4.1 Core Challenges Identified

4.1.1 *Rising demand and costs*

- Increased stray, abandoned, and seized dogs.
- Escalating kennel fees, transport costs, and veterinary expenses.
- XL Bully cases require prolonged kennelling, often funded by police or councils.

4.1.2 *Shrinking market capacity*

- Private kennels withdrawing from the market or selling sites.
- Charities reducing or restricting intake due to capacity, safety, or cost pressures.
- Councils increasingly forced to rely on ad-hoc or distant facilities.

4.1.3 *Inconsistent police involvement*

- Wide variation in police support across areas.
- In most authorities, police will only assess suspected XL Bullies if an owner comes forward.
- Councils and kennel providers frequently making breed-type decisions with limited formal support.

4.1.4 *XL Bully identification and enforcement*

- Shortage of accredited Dog Legislation Officers (DLOs).
- High costs for independent assessments.
- Significant emotional and professional burden on officers making euthanasia decisions.

4.1.5 Operational risk and workforce impact

- Staff exposed to aggressive behaviour from owners following enforcement action.
- Informal relationships are increasingly relied upon to keep services running.
- Limited resilience due to small teams and single-officer services in some councils.

4.1.6 Financial Examples Shared

- £86,000 per year for fifteen kennels (excluding veterinary costs).
- Kennelling expenditure has increased from a few thousand pounds to £50,000+ annually in some councils.
- There was an example of a police force increasing the budget linked to dangerous dog cases by £1million.
- Refurbishment of small in-house kennel facilities achievable for c.£35,000–£40,000

4.1.7 Preventative and Mitigating Approaches

- Early intervention with owners to prevent abandonment.
- Allowing voluntary surrender to councils to reduce risk and enforcement escalation.
- Strong links with:
 - Adult social care (Care Act cases).
 - Housing services.
 - Police and environmental services.
 - Community engagement, advice, and signposting (e.g. lower-cost veterinary care).
 - Pre-ban communication and guidance to owners affected by XL Bully legislation.

4.1.8 Key Risks and Gaps

Lack of consistent national data on:

- Dog ownership patterns.
- Stray volumes and long-term demand.
- Limited visibility of true costs across councils and police.
- Services remaining a “low priority” despite high operational and reputational risk.

4.1.9 Opportunities and Good Practice

- Investment in small-scale in-house kennels to reduce long-term spend.
- Formalising partnerships with kennels, vets, and assessors.
- Exploring council-run rehoming models.
- Using award schemes (e.g. RSPCA PawPrints) to:
 - Raise profile internally.
 - Improve standards.

- Support staff morale.

5 Considerations for Local Authorities

When looking at dog warden service local authorities may wish to consider the following: -

- Reviewing kennelling contracts and cost exposure, particularly for out-of-hours provision
- Assessing reclaim and rehoming trends to inform prevention and owner engagement activity
- Strengthening partnership working with animal welfare charities
- Monitoring ongoing impacts of national legislation and pressing government for clearer guidance and resources where responsibilities are shared

APSE Comment

The findings of the survey and the discussion from the round table demonstrate significant variation in service delivery models, charging structures and costs across local authorities, reflecting historic arrangements and differing local pressures rather than a consistent national framework.

While the direct impact of XL Bully legislation on council services appears limited to date, wider cost-of-living pressures are having a clear and immediate impact on demand, costs and outcomes for dog warden services. Rising abandonment levels and reduced reclaiming rates risk increasing pressure on already stretched kennelling capacity and budgets.

APSE notes the continued reliance on private and third-sector kennel provision and encourages authorities to review contractual resilience, cost controls and partnership arrangements. There may also be value in greater sector-wide collaboration and benchmarking to support appropriate charging structures and service sustainability.

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- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, Highways and Street Lighting
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