

Sandwell Council Animal Welfare Charter March 2026





Foreword

In March 2024, I welcomed the introduction of the Sandwell Animal Welfare Charter. The Charter sets out our commitment and aspirations to protect and promote animal welfare across the borough. It addresses a wide range of issues, from pesticide use and food production to angling, education, pet ownership and the keeping of exotic animals.

To ensure continued improvements in animal welfare, it is important that the Charter is regularly reviewed to reflect policy development and new legislation. By implementing these initiatives, Sandwell Council seeks to create a safer and more compassionate environment in which animals can thrive.

We are proud to have received the Gold Award in the RSPCA Paw Prints Awards 2025, recognising the significant progress we have made in caring for animals and supporting communities who go the extra mile to place animal welfare at the heart of their work.

As Council Leader, I was also honoured to receive the first-ever RSPCA Massingham Advocacy Award. I was incredibly pleased to receive this recognition from the RSPCA, which acknowledges my commitment to championing animal welfare, driving positive change, and positioning our council and borough at the forefront of animal welfare standards.

The Council has agreed a number of motions that help protect animals, while also increasing public safety and reducing nuisance to residents. Firework displays and the release of sky lanterns and helium balloons are no longer permitted on council-owned land or in other public spaces across Sandwell. To support animal welfare, the Council delivered the Fire Garden event in Sandwell Valley as an alternative to a traditional fireworks display.

In addition, the Council has established Animal Welfare and Firework Task Groups, bringing together relevant partner agencies, including charities and enforcement bodies. These groups meet regularly to raise awareness of animal welfare and the impacts of fireworks on animals and residents through local and national campaigns.

The Council aims to secure further improvements in animal welfare through both education and the enforcement of new and existing legislation. From April 2026, for example, anyone wishing to privately keep a primate in England must hold a valid Primate Licence issued by their local authority, ensuring primates are kept to the high welfare standards expected in licensed zoos. New import restrictions will also raise the minimum age for importing dogs, cats and ferrets to six months, prohibit the import of heavily pregnant animals (over 42 days), and ban the import of mutilated pets, such as those with cropped ears or docked tails.

I welcome the review of our Charter and look forward to working more closely with the RSPCA following the recent signing of our joint Memorandum of Understanding. This partnership strengthens our shared commitment to protecting animals.



Councillor Kerrie Carmichael
Leader of Sandwell Council

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1. Introduction

Sandwell Council has produced this Animal Welfare Charter to demonstrate our commitment to protecting and promoting the welfare of all animals and we aim to reflect the concerns of local people who care about animal welfare. The council hopes that in adopting this Charter, it will itself, as well as by inspiring others, contribute directly and indirectly to creating a world where all animals are respected and treated with kindness and compassion.

This Charter has been adopted from the RSPCA's charter which has been developed with respect to existing animal welfare legislation, notably the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and Environmental Protection Act 1990, including secondary legislation such as the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals (England) Regulations 2018.

We recognise animals as sentient beings who have a right to a life free from cruel treatment and unnecessary suffering and, as a matter of good practice, will take these factors into account when developing policy.

The Council takes its duties and responsibilities as stipulated in animal welfare legislation seriously and is committed to ensuring legislation is effectively enforced, including working collaboratively and in good faith with partner agencies and organisations, including not-for-profit local and national animal welfare organisations, when necessary and appropriate.

The Council recognises and appreciates the significant benefits animal ownership can have on people's physical and mental health and wellbeing. The Council equally considers that itself and other people have a duty of care towards animals, whether in their ownership or not, and must provide for their five basic welfare needs:

- The need for a suitable environment
- The need for a suitable diet
- The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
- The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease



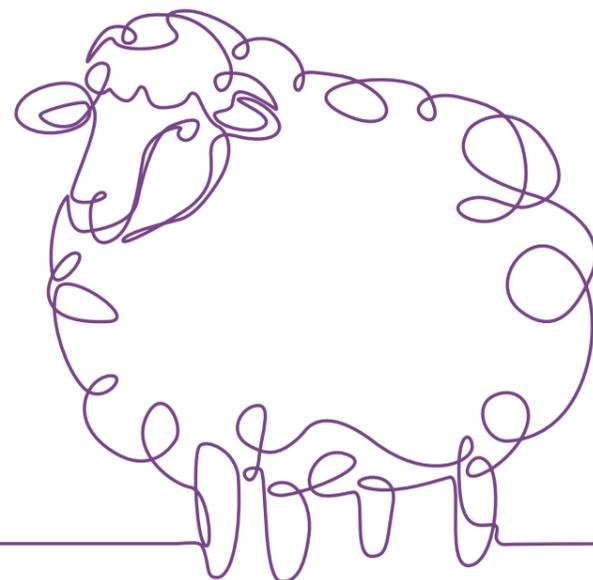
2. Licensing of Activities Involving Animals

Sandwell Council has a statutory duty to license premises and establishments that carry out activities involving animals, including but not limited to pet shops, dog breeding establishments, boarding establishments, animal exhibitions and riding establishments. We will take our statutory responsibilities under the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals (England) Regulations 2018 seriously and are committed to enforcing the legislation to the best of our ability to maximise compliance and reduce animal cruelty and neglect.

We will publish how we carry out our statutory duties in relation to animal activity licensing, in addition we will ensure information is made available and easily accessible by members of the public. There will be a clear process for members of the public to lodge formal complaints and concerns about licensing and suspected un-licensed activities involving animals. The Council will ensure all formal complaints and concerns are logged internally, in accordance with relevant data protection legislation.

The Council will aim to publish and maintain a publicly available list of licensed establishments, including star ratings.

The Council will work particularly closely with pet vendors and breeding establishments.



3. Stray Dog Services

Sandwell Council has a statutory responsibility, as stipulated by Section 149 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Environmental Protection (Stray Dogs) Regulations 1992, to seize and detain stray dogs within the jurisdiction of the Council. The Council defines a stray dog as any dog that is in a public place and not under the charge of a keeper.

The Council has outsourced its responsibilities in relation to stray dogs, nonetheless we will ensure our service provider meets the principles and requirements as set out in this Charter.

The Council is committed to a “no healthy dog will be euthanised” policy and considers the welfare of stray dogs, and indeed officers and the community, to be of the utmost importance and, in the process of all activities involved in carrying out stray dog

functions, that the welfare needs of dogs are met and officers and the community are protected from harm. Kennels and/or boarding establishments used in the process of carrying out our stray dog function will be licensed by the appropriate authority and have clear facilities, protocols and procedures to meet the animals’ welfare needs as defined by the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

We are committed to returning stray dogs to their owner, our provider will take all steps available to identify and contact the owner(s) of a stray dog to arrange for swift collection.

The Council will undertake regular proactive work to encourage responsible pet ownership, which may include (but not limited to) public awareness campaigns and events on a range of issues, such as microchipping, neutering, dogs in warm weather, fireworks, responsible dog ownership.

4. Housing

Sandwell Council recognises the fact that millions of people own pets and appreciates the physical and mental benefits pets and animals can bring to humans. We have produced guidance and advice to ensure pet owners residing in our housing are fully aware of their responsibility to meet the welfare needs of their pets. In recognition of our work in this area the Council was awarded the RSPCA Gold PawPrints status for its clear, positive guidance and flexibility to allow its tenants to keep pets on a case by case basis.

5. Contingency and Emergency Planning

Sandwell Council recognises and is committed to its responsibilities related to the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and subsequent secondary legislation.

We recognise our responsibility to consider animals, including companion animals, farm animals and wildlife, as part of our contingency and resilience plans.

We will aim to establish contact with reputable animal welfare organisations and local vets who can assist in emergency situations and invite such contacts to participate in contingency planning forums and exercises. We will ensure that an animal welfare element is included in live and tabletop contingency exercises.

We will consider the provision of support for establishments involved with large numbers of animals during the contingency and resilience planning process.

6. Council Land Use

Sandwell Council is committed to prohibiting activities with the potential to harm animals or wildlife from taking place on its land. We will not allow hunting (including trail-hunting or other related activities) on our land. The Council recognises that it may also be required to enforce statutory powers related to pest control. In such circumstances, the Council will only treat pest species where they represent a public health risk to the health or wellbeing of the local community and where necessary will seek to use the most humane and least toxic methods possible. We will not let our land be used by circuses or other similar enterprises where cages or performing animals are used and we prohibit the exchange of live animals as prizes being undertaken on any council-owned land.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 made it an offence for any animal to be sold or given as a prize to anyone under the age of 16 years. The Council does not support the provision of live animals, including fish, as prizes, in any of the Council's facilities, premises or land. The Council encourages other private premises or landowners to follow its lead.

We will seek to deter the public from engaging in activities on council land which are known to have a detrimental effect on wildlife habitats.

Fireworks, Sky Lanterns and Helium Balloons

Sandwell Council is committed to protecting the welfare of animals and reducing avoidable harm to pets, livestock and wildlife. The council recognises that fireworks are part of cultural celebrations such as Bonfire Night, New Year's Eve, Diwali and Chinese New Year. However, loud and unpredictable noises can cause significant distress, fear and injury to animals, as well as anxiety for some residents.

The release of sky lanterns and helium balloons also poses serious risks to animal welfare and the environment. These items can be mistaken for food by wildlife, cause entanglement or injury, contribute to pollution, and increase the risk of fires and property damage when they return to the ground.

To help safeguard animal welfare, protect wildlife habitats and promote safer public spaces, fireworks, sky lanterns and the release of helium balloons are not permitted on council-owned public land or in other public spaces across Sandwell. Residents and organisations are encouraged to choose alternative forms of celebration that are quieter, safer and more environmentally responsible.



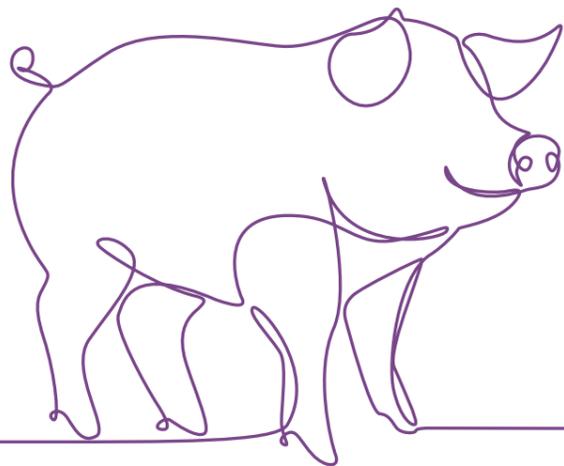
7. Wildlife, Pests, and the Use of Pesticides

Sandwell Council is committed to protecting and promoting the environment, wildlife, biodiversity and habitats, which includes all of our oceans, waterways, lakes, rivers and streams, and ponds.

We are committed to making minimum use of pesticides in all council-controlled public open spaces and we encourage the introduction of wildlife and fauna into these areas by sympathetic management. If chemicals must be used, we will use a type that would have minimal effect on the environment and wildlife and is on the "approved list" published by Defra under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986.

The Council will ensure that, where feasible hedgerows and roadside banks under council control will be managed to conserve, enhance and create safe habitats for birds and animals during the breeding season and encourage the growth of wildflowers.

We recognise that changes to the natural environment through land use changes or new developments can directly or indirectly affect wild animals and their habitats. Our development and planning permission frameworks require developers to consider and appropriately mitigate the risks of harming wildlife and habitats.



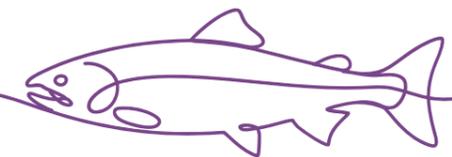
8. Angling

Sandwell Council encourages those who fish in Council-controlled waters or from council-controlled land to adopt the following code of practice based on the RSPCA's Medway Report.

The key points being:

- The use of double and treble hooks should be kept to a minimum and avoided entirely when intention is to return the catch alive to the water
- Fish intended for food should be killed humanely
- Unhooking a fish humanely and safely is one of the most important skills for an angler to learn. All anglers should be equipped with disgorgers and unhooking mats and be properly trained in their use
- Employment of the pike-gag should take fully into account the size of the fish for which it is used
- Barbless hooks should be favoured
- Holding periods in keep-nets should be as brief as possible

The Council considers the safe disposal of fishing tackle as essential; this is to prevent injury to both domestic and wild animals. All anglers are asked to ensure that they comply with national and regional bylaws relating to angling. Details of this legislation can be found by contacting the Environment Agency.



9. Education

Sandwell Council recognises its position as an educational authority and will use its powers in this respect to seek to educate the public about animal welfare, their responsibilities, and best practices to care for animals and reduce animal cruelty, abuse and neglect.

The Council will work closely with animal welfare organisations providing educational resources and services, such as the RSPCA's Education Team, and encourage schools and educational establishments to work closely and develop relationships with such organisations too.

10. Procurement, Food, and Animal By-Products

Sandwell Council recognises that it is a large purchaser of products and services and, as such, can have a direct and positive impact on animal welfare by implementing a procurement policy that protects animals and their welfare.

The Council, where relevant and legally appropriate, will take into account animal welfare issues when specifying products or services. We will seek to ensure that at least one vegetarian meal, to the specification of the Vegetarian Society of Great Britain, and one vegan meal, to the specification of the Vegan Society, will appear on all menus in council-run facilities or establishments where the Council has influence; including and especially schools and other educational facilities.

We will aim to ensure our council-run facilities, source meat and animal by-products from high-welfare friendly suppliers (ideally only those that meet RSPCA Assured's Higher Welfare Farm Animal Standards as a nationally recognised and respected assurance scheme).

The Council is opposed to the use of real fur on robes and other garments relating to Civic office. The Council will not use real fur on any such garments and replace existing real fur as soon as practically possible.

11. Promoting Responsible Pet Ownership

Sandwell Council recognises that many animals in the UK still suffer neglect and cruelty and feels it is right that measures be taken to reduce animal cruelty, abuse and neglect and protect and promote their welfare. We have a vital role in promoting responsible pet ownership as one means to reduce animal cruelty, abuse and neglect.

The Council considers that a pet should only be purchased once the prospective purchaser has the necessary equipment, facilities, time, financial means, level of interest and expertise to properly care for the animal and their welfare needs, and understand the responsibilities entailed with ownership of the pet. Some homes are unsuitable for the keeping of certain pets and some personal circumstances could mean that adequate provision for pets is difficult if not impossible.

We will encourage owners to ensure that their pets have sufficient space to avoid distress or suffering and discourage leaving animals unattended for an extended period at home during the day.

We believe animals should never be left unattended in motor vehicles, especially in warm weather and we will deliver public awareness campaigns and events to promote responsible pet ownership during warm weather. The Council will encourage and support the re-homing of rescued animals from recognised societies and establishments. Equally, will support and promote fostering and re-homing schemes of animal welfare charities. The Council does not approve of breeding animals for producing changes in bodily form, and/or function, which is detrimental to their health or quality of life.

If you have a tenancy with Sandwell Council and you wish to have a pet, you must first apply for permission.

The type of pet, the number of pets and the type of property you reside in could affect this decision.

All cases of pet cruelty or neglect will be a breach of tenancy, a possible criminal charge and could lead to the possible loss of your home.



12. Equine Welfare

In line with the RSPCA, the Council does not oppose an animal being tethered for short periods, e.g. for grooming, cleaning out stables, having a short break in a journey or working period, or in a field whilst boundary fencing is being installed or repaired. The Council would remind owners that a tethered horse requires adequate feed and must have water.

Sandwell Council supports the introduction of the Horse Passports Regulations (England) 2004 and the Protection Against Cruel Tethering Act 1988 and will not allow the long-term tethering of horses or ponies, in an open environment, on any land owned or managed by the Council.

13. Dangerous Wild Animals and Exotics

Sandwell Council enforces the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976.

Anyone keeping animals listed on the schedule should be licensed, have specialist knowledge and seek professional advice on the care of the animals.

Anyone selling an animal listed on the schedule must ensure that the buyer has the required licence.

The Council encourages the Government to continue to periodically review the animals listed on the schedule of Dangerous Wild Animals and supports the rigorous enforcement of the legislation.

The Council welcomes the introduction of Primate Licensing from April 2026 anyone wishing to privately keep a primate in England must hold a valid Primate Licence issued by their local authority, to ensure primates are kept to high welfare standards like those in licensed zoos.

14. Farm Animals

Sandwell Council has a policy for all animals within the management control of Forge Mill Farm across Sandwell Valley Country Park, Sandwell Valley Visitor Centre and Forge Mill Farm and any other location where animals within Sandwell Council's management control are located. This includes a variety of rare breed animals including sheep, goats, cattle, pigs, alpacas, horses, ponies, donkeys, chickens, ducks and rabbits.

The policy includes the provision of regular inspection, accreditation and certification from external organisations including a nominated vet practice. Forge Mill Farm's ambition is to become a centre of excellence in animal welfare food and farming education.

