



Costs of irresponsible dog ownership

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Key facts...

- ★ The cost of irresponsible dog ownership to the taxpayer is significant - £80.5 million.
- ★ With increasing cuts for funding and resources at a local level there is a need to find a means for funding enforcement and education.
- ★ One mechanism for doing this could be the introduction of an improved dog licensing (or registration) scheme.

The issue of the cost to the taxpayer of irresponsible dog ownership has been raised on a number of occasions and the following information sets out some of the estimated costs and key information about irresponsible dog ownership.

It is estimated there are between 8-10 million dogs in the UK, although accurate figures are difficult to obtain as there is no central database. The regional distribution of dog ownership varies, ranging from lows of nine per cent of households in London and 20 per cent for the south-east of England, to 25 per cent in Wales and more than 35 per cent in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The costs of dog ownership go beyond the cost of owning an individual dog, which the RSPCA estimates is around £650 a year, including feeding and veterinary fees, although of course this varies according to the breed of dog.

Dogs incur many external social costs, such as human health costs from dog bites and zoonoses, traffic accident costs, costs the British farming industry, those arising from irresponsible dog ownership such as stray or unwanted dogs, and enforcements costs to improve welfare, reduce cruelty and provide protection for people and animals¹.

Area	Estimated cost (per annum)
Attacks by dogs on farm livestock	£2.8 million
Dangerous dog control (by the police)	£3.7 million ²
Attacks by dogs on humans	£4 million
Zoonotic disease	£10 million
Road traffic accidents	£14 million
Stray dog control service	£46 million
Dog welfare issues (enforcement)	£52 million ³
Grand Total:	£80.5 million⁴

¹ For detailed breakdown of costs and how they are reached please see RSPCA report Improving dog ownership – the economic case for dog licensing August 2010

² NB. this only covers the costs of kennelling <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16972657> (accessed 13.08.14)

³ These are costs to the RSPCA so represent a minimum figure

⁴ Does not include the costs for dog welfare enforcement

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The RSPCA believes it is important that resources at a local level to deliver education and enforcement around responsible dog ownership are kept. Furthermore, opportunities to self-fund such resources should be considered such as an improved and updated licensing (or registration) scheme that uses microchip technology to ensure its effectiveness.

The RSPCA would not expect all individuals to comply with such a scheme and indeed those who did not could be targeted by the police and local authorities. Reading University, who did the economic research⁵ for the Society estimates it would cost around £30 million to set up such a scheme. Furthermore, with 75 per cent compliance rate a licence fee could be set at £14.30 or even with 50 per cent compliance rate the fee could be £21.50. Both of which are affordable for the average dog owner. The Society is keen to start the debate on this issue.

⁵Upton, M., Bennett, R., Wismore, T., Taylor, N., Hanks, J., Allison, K., and Pflug, S. (2010) Dog licensing and registration in the UK. Reading University. A report to the RSPCA. Economic data taken from returned questionnaires from a sample of dog warden services in the UK.