

What a dog daycare licence costs in England, who checks it, and who is outside it

Published by Genera Software and Duncan's Dog Co, a dog daycare licensed in Surrey since 2011. Every figure below is read from a council fee table, a statutory guidance page, a Freedom of Information answer or a court report, and each one is linked at the foot of the page.

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Duncan | Published 22 September 2026 | Figures checked **22 September 2026**

Eight findings

£286.50 to £915

The same dog day care licence costs £286.50 in Mole Valley and up to £915 in Epsom and Ewell, two councils that share a border and will be one authority in 2027.

£325 to £1,048

Across England the spread is wider: £325 in Liverpool, £1,048 in Bromley for a three-year licence once the council's vet inspection is added.

5 into 1

From 1 April 2027 five Surrey councils with five different fee structures become East Surrey Council. None has said which fee or which inspection regime survives.

0 vet visits

The guidance does not require a vet to inspect a daycare. Duncan's Dog Co has held its licence for fifteen years without one. Bromley charges £666 a time.

1 in 5 years

Wokingham Borough Council brought one prosecution for unlicensed animal activities between 2021 and 2025, and logged one complaint in 2025.

£393

A Welsh home boarder whose unlicensed premises saw two separate dog attacks was fined £393 in total, less than a licence costs in most of Surrey.

6 dogs

The six-dogs-per-walker limit binds only licensed daycares and boarders. An independent walker, a sitter or a hired field is outside the licence altogether.

10 years vs 18 weeks

The maximum sentence in Illinois for one dog's death in heat. The two concluded English hot-vehicle cases against professional dog walkers ended in 18 weeks and in no custody.

The same licence, six prices

A dog day care licence in England is one national licence, issued under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 and inspected against the same Defra guidance everywhere. The fee is set by each council. The process guidance says fees must be “fair and reasonable” and may cover the application, the inspection, compliance checks and enforcement against unlicensed businesses. In practice the price depends on the postcode.

What a new dog day care licence costs, 2026 fee tables

COUNCIL	NEW LICENCE	WHAT IS IN THE FIGURE
Mole Valley	£286.50	£166.50 application plus £120 licence. Lower tier, any size. Vet inspection extra where required.
Tandridge	£318	£198 application plus £120 licence. Vet inspection invoiced after the visit where required.

COUNCIL	NEW LICENCE	WHAT IS IN THE FIGURE
Liverpool	£325	One fee, no separate vet line.
Elmbridge	£432 or £510	£432 for five dogs or fewer, £510 for more than five. Renewals £380 and £449. Vet inspection extra where required.
Reigate and Banstead	£501	£381 plus £120 for up to ten dogs, then £53 per further ten dogs. The £120 is described as the recoverable enforcement cost.
Spelthorne	£600	£468 application plus £132 grant. Up from £568 the year before.
Epsom and Ewell	£665 to £915	£220 initial fee plus £445, £530 or £695 by licence length. The better the business is rated, the longer the licence and the more it pays up front.
Bromley	£1,048	£159 admin, £666 vet inspection for more than ten dogs, £223 grant for three years. A mid-term vet visit is another £311.

Mole Valley and Epsom and Ewell share a border. The same licence for the same business costs £286.50 on one side of it and £915 on the other for a three-year term. From April 2027 the same council will issue both.

Surrey: five fee schedules become one in 2027

On 1 April 2027 Surrey's eleven district and borough councils are replaced by two unitary authorities. East Surrey Council takes over Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead and Tandridge. West Surrey Council takes

Guildford, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Woking. Animal licensing moves with everything else.

The five councils becoming East Surrey Council

COUNCIL	NEW DAY CARE LICENCE	FEE STRUCTURE
Mole Valley	£286.50	Flat two-part fee, any size
Tandridge	£318	Flat two-part fee, any size
Elmbridge	£432 or £510	Two size bands, five dogs
Reigate and Banstead	£501 plus £53 per ten dogs	Size bands of ten dogs
Epsom and Ewell	£665 to £915	Priced by licence length, one to three years

Five councils, four different ways of pricing the same licence, and a threefold difference in what a licensed daycare pays. Nobody has yet said which fee East Surrey Council will adopt, which inspectors it will use, or whether a business rated five stars by one council keeps that rating and its three-year licence when the council that issued it no longer exists. Those are the questions this report puts to the shadow authority.

Who inspects, and whether a vet is needed

A vet must be appointed for the initial inspection for the licensed application for the breeding of dogs.

Animal activity licensing process: statutory guidance for local authorities, inspections. The same section lists the qualification for every other inspection: a Level 3 certificate from an Ofqual-regulated body, or a veterinary qualification.

A vet is not required to inspect a dog daycare. Some councils send one anyway and charge for it. Bromley charges £488 or £666 on a new application and £311 for a mid-term unannounced visit. Duncan's Dog Co has held a day care licence in Elmbridge since 2011 and has never been inspected by a vet. Both are within the guidance. The difference is several hundred pounds a year, decided by which side of a borough boundary the building stands.

Every licence carries at least one unannounced visit. A five-star licence lasts three years, so a well-run daycare can go three years between unannounced inspections. A one-star licence lasts a year and is re-inspected, at full cost, every year. New applicants are automatically rated high risk and cannot receive a three-year licence at first application.

Enforcement in numbers

Running a boarding or day care business without a licence is a criminal offence under section 13 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Whether anyone is prosecuted is left to each council. There is no national figure, so we asked one.

What the public record shows

MEASURE	FIGURE	WHERE IT COMES FROM

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Prosecutions for unlicensed animal activities, one council, 2021 to 2025	1	Wokingham Borough Council, FOI 20902, answered 5 January 2026
Complaints about unlicensed boarding logged by that council in 2025	1	Same response
Total fines for an unlicensed home boarder after two separate dog attacks a year apart	£393	Rhondda Cynon Taf Council press release, 19 March 2026 (Wales, 1963 Act)
Councils confirming in writing that a public Facebook advert is enough to open an investigation, without a complaint	2	East Riding of Yorkshire and East Suffolk, via Yappily Pulse Study 002
Cheapest licence in the table above	£286.50	Mole Valley

The £393 fine is less than a licence costs in every Surrey council in this report. A business that pays for a licence pays more than one that is caught without one.

The House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee said in April 2024 that councils' ability to enforce animal licensing is constrained by a lack of specialist knowledge and training and by inadequate funding. Two councils have since confirmed that the tools exist: an advert on social media is enough to begin an investigation and officers may contact the advertiser directly. The gap is not the law or the tools. It is whether anyone is asked to use them.

Who is outside the licence

Businesses that look after dogs in their owner's homes, "such as, dog sitters and dog walkers", do not need a licence. Condition 7.2 for a licensed daycare: "A dog walker may walk no more than 6 dogs at the same time."

Dog day care licensing: statutory guidance for local authorities, scope and condition 7.2

The 2018 Regulations list the activities that need a licence. Boarding dogs, including day care at a fixed premises, is one. Walking them is not. Sitting them in the owner's home is not. Hiring out a field for dogs is not. A licensed daycare that takes its dogs off the premises is limited to six dogs per walker under condition 7.2; an independent walker with twelve dogs in a hired field is subject to no condition at all, because no licence reaches them.

What binds a licensed daycare and what binds the alternative

REQUIREMENT	LICENSED DAYCARE	WALKER, SITTER OR HIRED FIELD
Staff to dogs on the premises	One person to ten dogs (one to eight for the higher standard)	None
Dogs per person on a walk	Six	None nationally; a few council park orders set four
Space per dog	Six square metres	None
Fencing	Two secure barriers between a dog and the road	None
Inspection	At least one unannounced visit per licence	None

REQUIREMENT	LICENSED DAYCARE	WALKER, SITTER OR HIRED FIELD
A number the public can check	Licence number and star rating, displayed	None

Some field-based and walking businesses are licensed by choice, and some councils have moved on their own: Tower Hamlets caps walkers at four dogs in a public place unless they hold the council's £240 professional dog walker licence, which allows six. That order covers public places only and stops at the park gate. The only people in dog care with a number on them are the ones who volunteered to be checked.

What the sentence is when a dog dies

The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021 raised the maximum sentence for the worst cruelty offences in England and Wales from six months to five years. Two professional dog walkers have since been sentenced after dogs in their care died in hot vehicles. Both pleaded guilty. Neither was licensed, because no licence exists for what they did.

Three concluded cases, a dog left in heat

COURT	WHAT HAPPENED	SENTENCE
Southampton Magistrates' Court, March 2022	Two clients' spaniels left in a car boot on 21 July 2021 at 29C by a professional dog walker. Both died.	18 weeks' imprisonment, eight-year ban on owning animals

COURT	WHAT HAPPENED	SENTENCE
York Magistrates' Court, March 2023	A client's cocker spaniel left in a professional dog walker's van for about five hours on 11 August 2022. Died of heatstroke.	Twelve-month community order, three-year ban on dealing with and transporting dogs, £400 costs. No custody
St Clair County, Illinois, September 2026	A Rottweiler left for hours in temperatures in the 90s Fahrenheit, then dragged from a vehicle by a chain and abandoned. Died the next day.	Ten years, the state maximum, at least five to be served

We are not arguing for American sentences. The point is narrower. In England a professional dog walker meets the system only after a dog is dead, because nothing can be inspected, conditioned or taken away before that. A disqualification order is the only record that follows them, and there is no public register of disqualified people that a dog owner can check before handing over a lead.

What five stars costs the business

The licence fee is the small part. The conditions set the wage bill. The required standard is one member of staff to ten dogs; the higher standard that earns a five-star rating is one to eight. Every person on the floor is paired with two fewer paying dogs.

Two dogs a person, over a year

Dogs given up per staff member at the higher standard	2
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Day rate	£30
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Days a week, weeks a year

5 × 48

Turnover given up per staff member per year

£14,400

At £30 a day, five days a week, 48 weeks a year. In return a five-star licence lasts three years instead of one.

Holiday cover under the ratio

Statutory holiday per full-time member of staff

5.6 weeks, 224 hours

National Living Wage from April 2026

£12.71 an hour

Paid to the person on holiday

£2,847

Paid again to the person standing in

£2,847

Cost of one full-timer's holiday, on a ratio that cannot drop

£5,694

A shop can run one person short for a week. A daycare at one to ten cannot, so every day of holiday is paid twice. With employer's National Insurance and pension added to both, roughly £6,700.

Space sets the ceiling: six square metres per dog, inside and outside counted together, divided into the total. A 120 square metre premises can never take more than twenty dogs whatever the demand. A Level 3 qualification for the person in charge is about £340 plus VAT. None of this applies to a business the licence does not reach.

The two petitions

Two petitions to Parliament are asking for the rules to be reviewed and for walkers and sitters to be brought inside them. Petition 770225, Review regulation of animal boarding and licensing conditions, known as Molly's Law, opened on 19 June 2026. Petition 776716, Introduce stronger welfare regulations for pet care services,

opened on 24 August 2026. On 22 September 2026 they had 1,174 and 1,768 signatures, 2,942 between them. Each needs 10,000 for a government response and 100,000 to be considered for a debate.

Duncan's Dog Co is a licensed business and supports both. A licence that costs its holders thousands a year in staffing and is enforced against almost nobody is worth less each year to the people who hold it and nothing at all to the dogs outside it.

Three changes we are asking for

CHANGE	WHY
A national enforcement standard, with the numbers published	Each council decides for itself whether to prosecute and none has to say how often it does. One council, one prosecution in five years, is the only figure on the public record because we asked for it.
Licence dog walkers and dog sitters	The six-dog limit, the ratio and the unannounced visit stop at the daycare gate. The businesses most often in the news for a dog's death are the ones no licence reaches.
One place to check any licence	Councils are told to keep a list online. Most do, in different formats, on different pages. A dog owner should be able to type a business name and see a number, a star rating and an expiry date.

Method and corrections

Fees were read from each council's published fee table or fees and charges schedule for 2026/27 on 22 September 2026. Where a council's page carries no fee year (Mole Valley, Tandridge) the figure is as listed on that date. The

enforcement figures are one council's FOI answer and one council's press release, both linked. The court outcomes are from contemporaneous local press reports of the sentencing hearings; we have not named the defendants here. Petition counts are read from petition.parliament.uk on the date shown and will move.

This report covers England unless it says otherwise. It is not legal advice. If a figure is wrong or has moved, email info@generasoftware.com and the page is corrected in place with the checked date updated. Nothing is appended.

Journalists are welcome to quote any figure with a link to this page. Duncan is available for interview and the daycare in Cobham is open to visit.

Sources

1. **Mole Valley District Council, animal activities licensing, fees as listed on 22 September 2026**

Lower tier (home boarding and day care for dogs): Part A application £166.50, Part B licence £120, total £286.50. Vet inspection, where required, charged in addition.

2. **Tandridge District Council, animal licences, fees as listed on 22 September 2026**

Lower tier: Part A £198, Part B £120, total £318. Vet inspection invoiced after the visit where required.

3. **Elmbridge Borough Council, animal welfare licence fees from 1 April 2026**

Day care for dogs, five or fewer: £432 new, £380 renewal. Large day care centre, more than five dogs: £510 new, £449 renewal. Veterinary inspections where required charged separately.

4. **Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, animal licence fees 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027**

Dog day care: £381 Part A plus £120 Part B, £501 new and £421 renewal for up to ten dogs, plus £53 per additional ten dogs. Part B is described as the recoverable enforcement cost. Vet inspection invoiced separately.

5. **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, fees and charges 2026/27, Appendix 2 (licensing)**

Animal welfare (boarding, day care, breeding, kennels and catteries): initial fee £220 plus a licence fee by length, £445 for one year, £530 for two, £695 for three. A new three-year licence is therefore £915.

6. **Spelthorne Borough Council, fees and charges 2026/27**

Dog day care £600 (application £468, grant £132), up from £568 in 2025/26.

7. **Liverpool City Council, dog day care licence 2026**

£325, no separate vet line.

8. **London Borough of Bromley, animal welfare licensing fees 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027**

Admin £159; vet inspection on a new application £488 (fewer than ten dogs) or £666 (more than ten); grant £75, £150 or £223 by licence length; mid-term unannounced vet visit £311. A three-year licence for more than ten dogs comes to £1,048.

9. **Surrey County Council, government confirms new East and West councils for Surrey**

East Surrey Council takes over Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead and Tandridge from 1 April 2027; West Surrey Council takes Guildford, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Woking.

10. **Animal activity licensing process: statutory guidance for local authorities (Defra, updated 1 June 2026)**

What councils may charge for and the fair and reasonable fees line; inspector qualifications; when a vet is required; star ratings and licence lengths; at least one unannounced visit per licence.

11. **Dog day care licensing: statutory guidance for local authorities (Defra, updated 1 June 2026)**

Scope and the exclusion of dog walkers and sitters; condition 4.1 (one member of staff to ten dogs, six square metres per dog) and the higher standard of one to eight; condition 5.1 (two secure barriers); condition 7.2 (six dogs per walker).

12. **The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018, Schedule 1**

The licensable activities. Dog walking, dog sitting and hiring out a field are not among them.

13. **Animal Welfare Act 2006, section 13**

Carrying on a licensable activity without a licence is an offence.

14. **Wokingham Borough Council, FOI response 20902, investigations into unlicensed dog boarding and kennels 2021 to 2025 (answered 5 January 2026)**

One prosecution in 2023 in connection with unlicensed animal activities, the only one in the period; one complaint in 2025.

15. **Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, unlicensed Aberdare dog boarder prosecuted (19 March 2026)**

Complaints in October 2024 and July 2025, each after a dog was attacked; guilty plea at Merthyr Magistrates' Court on 11 February 2026; fines totalling £393 under the Animal Boarding Establishments Act 1963.

16. **Yappily Pulse, Study 002: councils' use of social media in unlicensed home boarding investigations (September 2026)**

Written answers from East Riding of Yorkshire Council and East Suffolk Council: a public advert can start an investigation and be evidence, and officers may contact the advertiser directly.

17. **House of Commons EFRA Committee, Pet welfare and abuse (April 2024)**

Councils' ability to enforce is constrained by a lack of specialist knowledge and training, and inadequate funding and resources.

18. **London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Public Spaces Protection Order (dog control), Part 5**

No more than four dogs per person in a public place unless the walker holds the council's professional dog walker licence, which allows six. £240 from 1 April 2026.

19. **KMOV First Alert 4, man given maximum sentence for animal cruelty incident in Washington Park (17 September 2026)**

St Clair County, Illinois. Ten years, the statutory maximum, after a jury conviction for animal torture, aggravated animal cruelty and animal cruelty. The dog was left in temperatures in the 90s Fahrenheit, dragged from a vehicle by a chain and abandoned; it died the next day.

20. **The News (Portsmouth), Hampshire professional dog walker jailed after two clients' dogs died in her car (March 2022)**

Southampton Magistrates' Court, 28 March 2022. Two spaniels left in a car boot on 21 July 2021 at 29C. Guilty plea to causing unnecessary suffering. Eighteen weeks' imprisonment and an eight-year ban on owning animals.

21. **Gazette & Herald, professional York dog walker caused spaniel's death in heatwave (March 2023)**

York Magistrates' Court, 3 March 2023. A cocker spaniel left in a van for about five hours on 11 August 2022. Guilty plea. Twelve-month community order, three-year ban on dealing with and transporting dogs, £400 costs and £95 surcharge. No custody.

22. **Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021**

In force 29 June 2021. Raised the maximum sentence for the worst animal cruelty offences in England and Wales from six months to five years.

23. **National Living Wage from 1 April 2026**

£12.71 an hour for workers aged 21 and over.

24. **Working Time Regulations 1998, regulations 13 and 13A**

5.6 weeks' statutory holiday, capped at 28 days.

25. **Petition 770225, Review regulation of animal boarding and licensing conditions (Molly's Law)**

Opened 19 June 2026. 1,174 signatures on 22 September 2026.

26. **Petition 776716, Introduce stronger welfare regulations for pet care services**

Opened 24 August 2026. 1,768 signatures on 22 September 2026.



Duncan

Founder of Genera and owner of Duncan's Doggy Daycare

Duncan has run Duncan's Doggy Daycare for 15 years. Genera is the software he built to run his own pet business, shaped by what actually works day to day, not theory.