



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Prepared by the Department of Rural
and Community Development

Dog Breeding Establishment Guidelines

Cover Note

July 2018

1. Introduction

The Department of Rural and Community Development (the Department) has put in place a revised set of Guidelines for Dog Breeding Establishments (DBEs). The Guidelines have been published on the Department's website. This note provides information on the process that has been undertaken to date in order to revise these Guidelines and includes information on the next steps in this area.

The Guidelines are in place to support the improvement of standards in DBEs and form part of the framework within which local authorities carry out inspections and issue improvement notices where required. There is a substantial shift in the new guidelines towards a focus on the welfare of dogs and pups. Better socialised pups, housed in appropriate accommodation make for better pets. Where there is a focus on socialisation in the key first few weeks of life, there is a smoother transition to life in a family home.

2. Background

Under the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010, the Minister can issue Guidelines for Dog Breeding Establishments¹. The first set of Guidelines became effective from January 2012. They related to the operation of establishments and compliance with the Act.

The next iteration of draft Guidelines, developed by a working group² of industry experts, were subject to a public consultation process which closed on 28 February 2017. In February 2018, the Department published a report summarising the 117 responses received to the consultation process and outlining the next steps. The responses received were also published.

Following consideration of the responses, and a further engagement with organisations that sat on the original working group, the Department made further changes to the draft guidelines.

¹ A Dog Breeding Establishment means a premises at which bitches are kept, not less than 6 of which are (a) more than 6 months old, and (b) capable of being used for breeding purposes.

² The working group included representatives from the ISPCA, the DSPCA, the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine, the Department of Agriculture Northern Ireland, Local Authority Veterinary Inspectors, and the then Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

3. Technical changes to new Guidelines

The Guidelines that were published for public consultation included proposed changes relating to standards and sizes for kennels, guidance for exercise areas, hygiene protocols, exercise periods, socialisation, staffing requirements (at minimum of 1 whole time equivalent per 30 female dogs), training requirements for staff (larger establishments required to have at least one member formally trained), breeding programmes and retirement plans.

Following consideration of the comments received through the consultation process, further changes have also been included. These include:

- strengthening the language, for example, the insertion of *must* instead of *should*,
- providing greater clarity on suitable socialisation of dogs and pups,
- greater emphasis on the need for accurate record keeping by DBEs,
- generally providing more clarification on the requirements,
- the staff to breeding bitches ratio has been revised from 1:30 to 1:25³,

For further details please refer to the Guidelines which are published alongside this document.

4. Next steps

Many of the comments received through the consultation process could not be addressed simply by redrafting the Guidelines. In many cases they would require a change to primary legislation. The Department will consider these and other points further later this year when reviewing the legislation that is in place in this area.

Some examples include:

- Many respondents suggested changing the definition of a DBE to refer to three rather than six breeding bitches. Others mentioned that the current definition covers Hunt Clubs, etc. and that this may not be appropriate.
- The concept of offences for non-compliance was mentioned by respondents.
- The placing of limits on the number of breeding bitches in individual DBEs was raised by respondents. This was on the basis that a high number of dogs could lead to welfare, socialisation and/or other issues. The Department accepts that issues impacting on compliance with the Guidelines should be resolved. However, it might be appropriate that,

³ The original Guidelines did not include a ratio. The version published for consultation included 1:30. It is now proposed to use 1:25.

rather than having an overall cap, such issues could be resolved through improvements notices in individual cases. The Department will consider this point further.

- Other comments related to introducing requirements regarding the sale of animals. While the Guidelines now state that a pup cannot be permanently removed from its mother before it is six weeks of age, in general, these Guidelines (or the legislation that govern them) do not cover the sale of animals.