

Animal Cruelty

Animal Welfare Act 2006, s.4 (unnecessary suffering), s.5 (mutilation), s.6 (docking of dogs' tails), s.7 (administration of poisons etc), s.8 (fighting etc)

Effective from: XXXXXXXXX

Triable either way

Maximum: 5 years' custody

Offence range: Band A fine – 3 years' custody

Step 1 – Determining the offence category

The court should determine culpability and harm caused with reference **only** to the factors below. Where an offence does not fall squarely into a category, individual factors may require a degree of weighting before making an overall assessment and determining the appropriate offence category.

Culpability demonstrated by one or more of the following

The court should weigh all the factors set out below in determining the offender's culpability. Where there are characteristics present which fall under different levels of culpability, the court should balance these characteristics to reach a fair assessment of the offender's culpability.

<p>A High culpability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged and/or repeated incidents of serious cruelty and/or sadistic behaviour • Use of very significant force • Leading role in illegal activity • Category B offence may be elevated to category A by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ the extreme nature of one or more medium culpability factors ◦ the extreme impact caused by a combination of medium culpability factors
<p>B Medium culpability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberate or gratuitous attempt to cause suffering • Prolonged and/or repeated incidents of cruelty or neglect • Use of significant force • Ill treatment in a commercial context • Deliberate disregard for the welfare of the animal (including failure to seek treatment) • Other cases that fall between categories A or C because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Factors are present in A and C which balance each other out, and/or, ◦ The offender's culpability falls between the factors as described in A and C

C Lower culpability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-intentioned but incompetent care • Momentary or brief lapse in judgement • Involved through coercion, intimidation or exploitation • Mental disorder or learning disability, where linked to the commission of the offence
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Harm demonstrated by one or more of the following

The court should consider the factors set out below to determine the level of harm that has been caused or was intended to be caused to the victim.

Category 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death (including injury necessitating euthanasia) • Particularly grave or life-threatening injury or condition caused • Very high level of pain and/or suffering caused
Category 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offence results in an injury or condition which has a substantial and/or lasting effect (including cases of tail docking, ear clipping and similar forms of mutilation) • Substantial level of pain and/or suffering caused
Category 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little or no physical/developmental harm or distress • All other levels of pain and/or suffering

Step 2 – Starting point and category range

	High culpability	Medium culpability	Lower culpability
Category 1	Starting point 1 year 6 months' custody	Starting point 26 weeks' custody	Starting point Low level community order
	Category range 26 weeks' custody – 3 years' custody	Category range 18 weeks' – 1 year's custody	Category range Band B fine – Medium level community order
Category 2	Starting point 26 weeks' custody	Starting point 12 weeks' custody	Starting point Band C fine
	Category range 18 weeks' – 1 year's custody	Category range Medium level community order – 26 weeks' custody	Category range Band B fine – Low level community order
Category 3	Starting point 12 weeks' custody	Starting point Medium level community order	Starting point Band B fine
	Category range Medium level community order – 26 weeks' custody	Category range Low level community order – High level community order	Category range Band A fine – Band C fine

The court should then consider further adjustment for any aggravating or mitigating factors. The following is a **non-exhaustive** list of additional factual elements providing the context of the offence and factors relating to the offender. Identify whether any combination of these, or other relevant factors, should result in an upward or downward adjustment from the sentence arrived at so far.

Factors increasing seriousness

Statutory aggravating factors

- Previous convictions, having regard to a) the **nature** of the offence to which the conviction relates and its **relevance** to the current offence; and b) the **time** that has elapsed since the conviction
- Offence committed whilst on bail
- Offence motivated by, or demonstrating hostility based on any of the following characteristics or presumed characteristics of the owner/keeper of the animal: religion, race, disability, sexual orientation or transgender identity

Other aggravating factors

- Failure to comply with current court orders
- Offence committed on licence or post sentence supervision
- Significant number of animals involved
- Use of a weapon
- Allowing person of insufficient experience or training to have care of animal(s)
- Use of technology, including circulating details/photographs/videos etc of the offence on social media, to record, publicise or promote cruelty
- Ignores warning/professional advice/declines to obtain professional advice
- Use of another animal to inflict death or injury
- Offender in position of professional responsibility for animals
- Offence committed in the presence of other(s), especially children
- Animal requires significant intervention to recover
- Animal being used in public service or as an assistance dog
- Distress caused to owner where not responsible for the offence

Factors reducing seriousness or reflecting personal mitigation

- No previous convictions **or** no relevant/recent convictions
- Remorse
- Good character and/or exemplary conduct
- Serious medical condition requiring urgent, intensive or long-term treatment
- Age and/or lack of maturity
- Mental disorder or learning disability, where not linked to the commission of the offence
- Sole or primary carer for dependent relatives
- Offender has been given an inappropriate level of trust or responsibility
- Voluntary surrender of animals to authorities
- Cooperation with the investigation
- Isolated incident

Step 3 – Consider any factors which indicate a reduction, such as assistance to the prosecution

The court should take into account section 74 of the Sentencing Code (reduction in sentence for assistance to prosecution) and any other rule of law by virtue of which an offender may receive a discounted sentence in consequence of assistance given (or offered) to the prosecutor or investigator.

Step 4 – Reduction for guilty pleas

The court should take account of any potential reduction for a guilty plea in accordance with section 73 of the Sentencing Code and the Reduction in Sentence for a Guilty Plea guideline.

Step 5 – Totality principle

If sentencing an offender for more than one offence, or where the offender is already serving a sentence, consider whether the total sentence is just and proportionate to the overall offending behaviour in accordance with the Totality guideline.

Step 6 – Compensation and ancillary orders

In all cases, the court should consider whether to make [compensation](#) and/or other [ancillary orders](#) including [deprivation of ownership](#) and [disqualification of ownership of animals](#). Where the offence has resulted in personal injury, loss or damage the court must give reasons if it decides not to order compensation ([Sentencing Code, s.55](#)).

- Ancillary orders – Magistrates' Court
- Ancillary orders – Crown Court Compendium

Step 7 – Reasons

Section 52 of the Sentencing Code imposes a duty to give reasons for, and explain the effect of, the sentence.

Step 8 – Consideration for time spent on bail (tagged curfew)

The court must consider whether to give credit for time spent on bail in accordance with section 240A of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and section 325 of the Sentencing Code.