

## Press release: Sentences increased for gang who illegally sold thousands of farmed puppies

Four men have today had their sentences increased after the Solicitor General, Robert Buckland QC MP, personally presented their cases to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence scheme.

Simon O'Donnell, Thomas Stokes, Edward Stokes, and Daniel Doherty were part of a puppy-farming conspiracy thought to have raised around £2 million. O'Donnell, Thomas Stokes and Edward Stokes were involved in importing farmed puppies from abroad; while Doherty, a vet who practised in West London, provided them with misleading welfare documents, including immunisation certificates, which were used to reassure the people who bought the puppies.

Many of the supposedly healthy puppies sold by this group became unwell, leaving their owners with significant veterinary bills, or even the traumatic decision of whether to have them euthanised.

O'Donnell, Doherty, and Thomas Stokes were originally sentenced at Isleworth Crown Court in May, Edward Stokes in June. O'Donnell and Thomas Stokes both received 3 years' imprisonment. Edward Stokes received 2 years' imprisonment suspended for two years, as well as conditions of 200 hours unpaid work and 15 days rehabilitation activity. Doherty received 12 months' imprisonment suspended for 12 months, as well as a requirement of 80 hours unpaid work.

Today, after the Solicitor General's referral, the Court of Appeal increased all 4 sentences. Thomas Stokes' sentence was increased to 4 years 8 months, and O'Donnell's sentence was increased to 4 years imprisonment.

The other 2 offenders have now been given immediate prison terms. E Stokes had his suspended sentence increased to 4 years 8 months imprisonment, Doherty's suspended sentence was increased to 3 years 6 months imprisonment.

Commenting on the sentencing increases, the Solicitor General said:

This group not only subjected thousands of puppies to atrocious living conditions, but also caused immense distress to families who had to watch their new pets suffer from serious illness. I am pleased that the Court of Appeal has today agreed to increase all 4 sentences, and hope this will bring some comfort to the victims of their crimes.