Johnson's® veterinary

# PET OWNER SURVEY REPORT

## March 2026

A British family business caring for the nation's pets since 1921


**Since Johnson's Veterinary Products was founded as a family business in 1921, we have been committed to providing healthcare products that help pets and their owners live better lives. That commitment has never wavered, even as the world around us continues to change.**

In 2023, we published the findings of our first major Pet Owner Survey, which offered the pet care trade valuable insights into consumer behaviour, attitudes toward independent pet retailers, and the factors that shape purchasing decisions. We promised to return with a follow-up, and we have kept that promise.

This second survey, conducted in February 2026 among more than a thousand UK pet owners, builds on those foundations. We can now track how the market has shifted since our last report, and we have also expanded the scope considerably, exploring the impact of the cost of living on product choices, how social media and AI are influencing the way owners seek information, how often people visit their local pet shop, and what would bring them through the door more regularly.

The results tell an encouraging story for independent pet retailers. Quality is now the top driver of purchasing decisions. Two-thirds of pet owners consider independent pet shops important to their communities. Nearly six in ten would willingly pay more to support them. These are not just statistics. They are signals that the independent pet trade has a loyal customer base that values what it offers, and that there are clear, practical steps retailers can take to strengthen that relationship further.

We undertake this research for the benefit of the wider pet care industry, and particularly for the independent retailers who are the backbone of the sector. Our goal is to equip shop owners with the insights they need to understand their customers, respond to changing demand, and build the kind of loyalty that sustains businesses for the long term.

I hope you find the results as valuable as we do. If you have any questions about the information contained within this report, please get in touch.

Regards

**Paul Gwynn**
Chairman

*Over the following pages you will see the questions we asked our audience and their responses in graphical format, with a summary of the data for you to read through, if you prefer. Where questions were repeated from our 2022 survey, we have highlighted the changes over time to show how the market is evolving.*

*We have also added our own conclusions at the end, explaining what the findings mean for independent pet retailers and the wider pet care trade.*

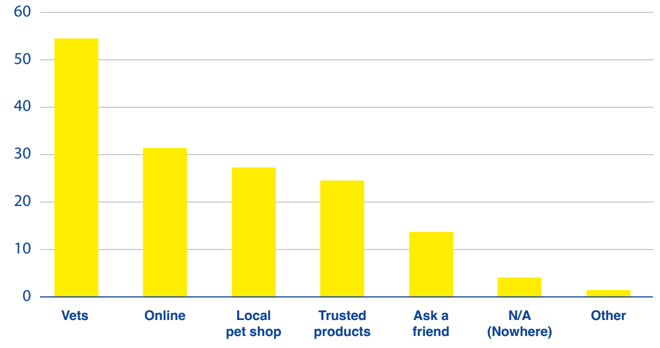
# Where do pet owners seek advice?

**When pet owners need help with common ailments like fleas, where do they turn first, and what role can independent pet shops play in becoming a more trusted source of guidance?**

Vets remain the first port of call for pet owners dealing with a flea issue, with 55% choosing to consult their veterinary practice, broadly consistent with the 57% recorded in 2022. Online searching has declined from 35% to 31%, while the proportion choosing to visit their local pet shop has dipped from 34% to 28%.

### 2026

**Q1. Where, if anywhere, would you go for advice if your pet got fleas?**



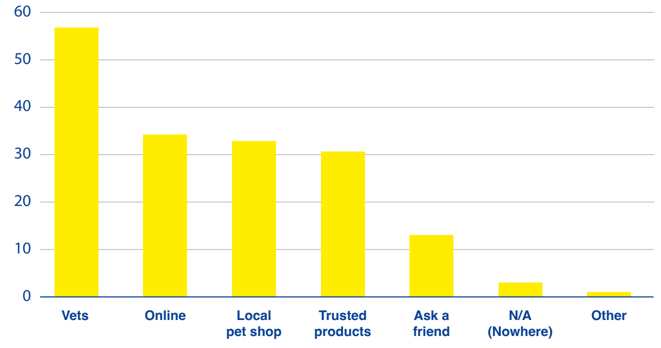

It is important to remind ourselves that our 2022 survey found that trust (43%) and habit (39%) were the primary reasons pet owners stick with their chosen source of advice. Once a customer trusts their local pet shop, they tend to keep coming back. So the opportunity for independents lies in building that initial trust, particularly among younger pet owners who are still forming their habits.

Among 18 to 24 year olds, just 27% currently turn to a pet shop for flea advice, but this is the same age group where 37% said cruelty-free products matter and 47% are already using social media for pet information. They are engaged, actively seeking guidance, and open to forming new loyalties. Reaching them requires visibility, approachability, and meeting them where they already are, online and in the community.

Those aged 25 to 34 remain the most likely to research online before making a decision (41%), which presents an opportunity for pet shops with a digital presence. A well-

### 2022

**Q1. Where, if anywhere, would you go for advice if your pet got fleas?**




maintained website, active social media, and positive Google reviews can capture this research-first audience and draw them into the shop. As we will see throughout this report, the 25 to 34 demographic emerges as a critical group for the independent pet trade: digitally active, emotionally engaged, and already visiting more frequently than any other age group.

**28%** of **pet owners** turn to their local pet shop for **flea advice**

**Trust and habit are the top reasons people stick with their chosen source**

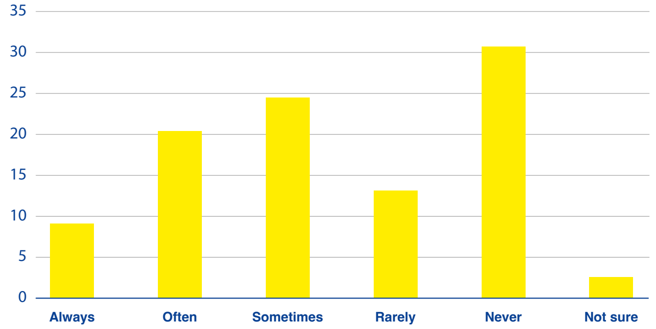
## Social media, AI, and the advice landscape

A new question for 2026 explored how frequently pet owners turn to social media platforms or AI tools for pet and product information. Overall, 29% use these channels always or often, rising to 54% among 25 to 34 year olds and 47% among 18 to 24 year olds.

For independent retailers, this is not a threat but an insight. Pet owners are actively seeking information through digital channels, and much of what they find is unverified. A pet shop that positions itself as a credible, knowledgeable voice, whether through helpful social media content, short video guides, or simply by being the place customers turn to after seeing something online, can bridge the gap between digital curiosity and trusted in-store advice.

Among the over-55s, 57% said they never use social media or AI for pet information, reinforcing that face-to-face guidance remains the primary channel for this demographic. No single approach will suit every customer. The shops that thrive will be those that offer expertise both over the counter and on the screen.

**Q14. How often, if at all, have you turned to social media (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, Facebook) or AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) for pet or pet product information?**



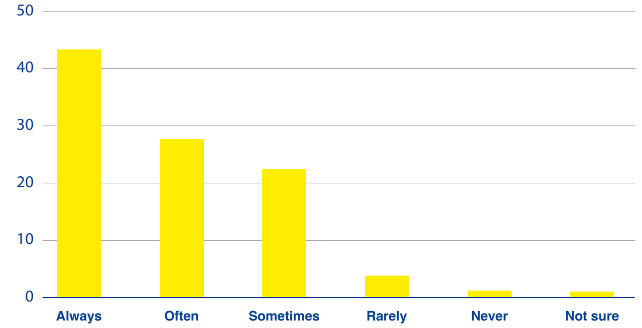

**54%** of **25 to 34 year olds** regularly turn to **social media** or **AI** for pet information

**Independent pet shops can become the trusted voice that makes sense of it all**

## The informed consumer

**The importance of trust does not end with where pet owners seek advice. It extends to what they buy and how carefully they evaluate it.**

**Q2. How often, if at all, do you read product packaging prior to treating your pet for any issue?**



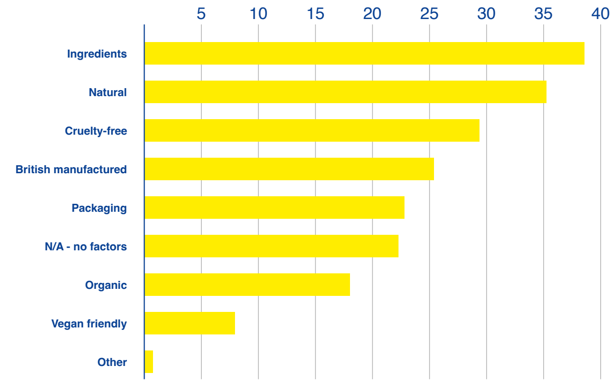

A significant majority of pet owners (71%) said they always or often read product packaging before treating their pet. This rose to 76% among both the 45 to 54 and 55+ age groups. Even among the youngest respondents, 59% claimed to read packaging information at least often. Pet owners are not passive buyers; they want to understand what they are putting on or giving to their animals.

This is one of the clearest advantages independent pet shops hold. Shop staff who can explain what is in a product, why it works, how it compares to alternatives is doing something a shelf label or product listing page simply cannot. Customers are already reading the packaging. Shops that train staff to go further, offering informed, confident advice about ingredients, safety and suitability, will turn that curiosity into loyalty.

When asked which environmental factors influence their purchasing, ingredients topped the list (38%), followed by whether a product is natural (35%) and its cruelty-free credentials (30%). British manufacturing was cited by 26%, and packaging materials by 23%.

The priorities varied by age. Over-55s were most concerned about cruelty-free credentials (38%) and British manufacturing (31%), while 25 to 34 year olds, the cohort already identified as the most digitally active and frequent visitors, placed the greatest emphasis on organic ingredients (34%) and packaging materials (30%). For independent retailers, the environmental story is not one-size-fits-all. Knowing your local customer base and stocking accordingly, then communicating those values clearly through in-store signage and conversation, will help differentiate the offer.

**Q6. Which, if any, environmental factors are important to your purchasing decisions?**




Only 22% of respondents said no environmental factors mattered to them at all. Nearly four in five pet owners are, to some extent, making ethical or environmental judgements about what they buy. This is a market that rewards transparency, and independent pet shops are ideally placed to deliver it.

**71%** of **pet owners** always or often **read product packaging** before treating their pet

**Knowledgeable staff who can go beyond the label are a competitive advantage**

Quality has overtaken cost as the top factor driving pet product purchases reversing the 2022 position

This plays directly to the strengths of independent retailers

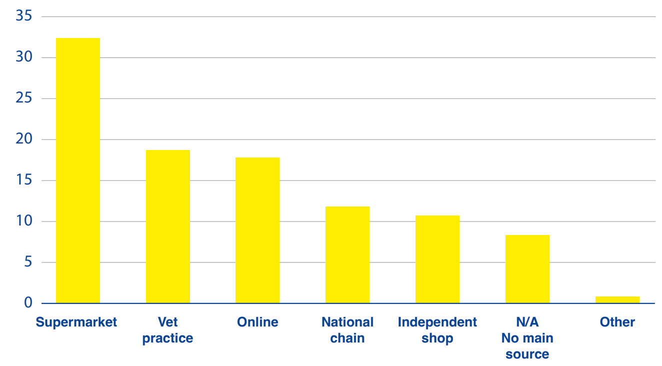
# Where pet owners shop and what drives them

**If pet owners are informed, engaged and increasingly driven by quality and trust, the question becomes: where are they currently spending their money, and what would it take to shift that balance?**

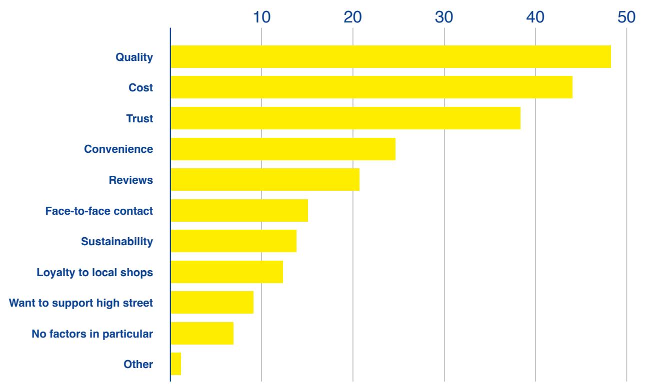
When asked to name their single main source of pet products, 32% of respondents said supermarkets, followed by vet practices (19%), online retailers (17%), national chains (12%) and independent shops (12%). The supermarket figure reflects the sheer convenience of picking up pet products alongside a weekly food shop, rather than any particular confidence in the range or quality on offer.

For independents, the 12% figure represents a baseline with room to grow, especially given what the survey reveals about what drives purchasing decisions.

**Q5. What, if anything, best describes your main source of pet products?**




**Q4. What factors most influence your purchasing decisions for pet products, if any?**




## Quality has overtaken cost

In a notable shift since 2022, quality has overtaken cost as the primary factor influencing purchasing decisions. In 2026, 49% cited quality as a key driver, compared with 45% for cost. In 2022, the reverse was true: cost led at 50%, quality at 46%.

This represents a significant shift in the market. It tells us that pet owners are not simply defaulting to the cheapest option. They are making considered choices, and they are prioritising effectiveness and reliability. Trust, which was not offered as a standalone option in 2022, emerged as the third most influential factor at 39%, reinforcing the value of the personal, knowledgeable service that defines the independent pet shop experience.

Convenience (24%) and reviews (20%) also featured prominently. Face-to-face contact was valued by 14%, while loyalty to local shops (12%) and a desire to support the high street (9%) showed that community-minded motivations, though not dominant, are present across the customer base.

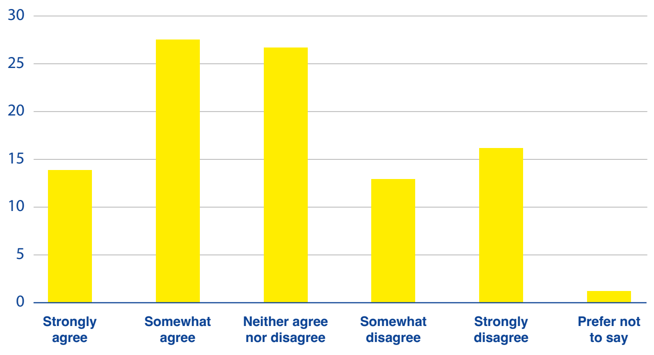
Among 35 to 44 year olds, reviews were the most influential secondary factor (31%), underscoring the importance of a strong online reputation. Investing time in encouraging satisfied customers to leave reviews, and responding to feedback publicly, can shift perceptions among this research-driven demographic.

# The cost of living and pet ownership

**The shift toward quality does not mean that price has become irrelevant. Household budgets are under real pressure, and the data reveals how pet owners are navigating that tension.**

When asked whether they had switched pet products for affordability in the past 12 months, 42% agreed. This was most pronounced among younger owners: 55% of 25 to 34 year olds and 50% of 18 to 24 year olds reported switching, compared with 29% of those aged 55 and over.

**Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? 'Due to the rising cost of living, I have found myself switching pet products for affordability in the last 12 months'**




The generational pattern is significant, because the demographic feeling the greatest financial pressure is the same one already shown to be the most frequent visitor to pet shops and the most emotionally invested in their survival. Among 25 to 34 year olds, 52% visit at least once a week, if not more. They are walking through the door, but they need reassurance that what they buy offers genuine value. In this context, staff expertise becomes particularly important. Helping a customer choose a product that works well at a fair price builds more lasting loyalty than discounting alone.

Read alongside the purchasing data, a nuanced picture emerges. Pet owners have not abandoned quality in favour of the cheapest option. They are looking for value, for products that deliver on effectiveness without breaking the bank. Independent retailers who curate their ranges with this balance in mind, stocking products that are both effective and competitively priced, can position themselves as the smart choice rather than the expensive one.

Regional variation also offers insight. Pet owners in Greater London (55%), Wales (46%) and the East of England (46%) were most likely to have switched products for affordability. Retailers in areas where cost sensitivity is highest may benefit from more visible value messaging, special offers, or loyalty incentives that acknowledge the economic reality without undermining the quality proposition.

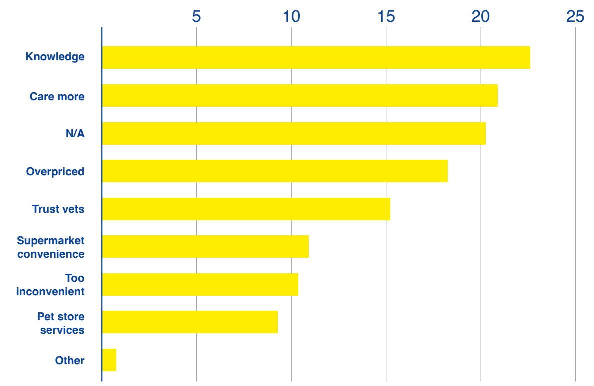
**42%** of **pet owners** have switched products for **affordability** in the past year

**Quality now outranks cost as the top purchasing driver**

# Sentiment toward independent pet shops

**The data so far has shown that pet owners value quality, trust advice, and are actively engaged with what they buy. The question now is how they feel about the retailers best placed to deliver on all three.**

**Q3. What, if any, are your feelings about independent pet shops in comparison to other stockists?**




Asked about their feelings toward independent pet shops, 23% described them as knowledgeable with trusted opinions, down from 28% in 2022. A further 21% said independents care more about them and their pet than bigger stores, consistent with 2022. Meanwhile, 19% found them overpriced (down from 22%), and 21% had no strong feelings either way.

The slight dip in the knowledgeable and trusted figure should be seen as an opportunity, not a setback. It does not suggest that pet shops have become less knowledgeable. Rather, it may reflect the fact that a growing proportion of consumers (26% of all respondents in 2022) have never visited a local pet shop. You cannot trust what you have never experienced. Getting customers through the door for the first time is half the battle; the knowledge and care that independent retailers provide can do the rest.

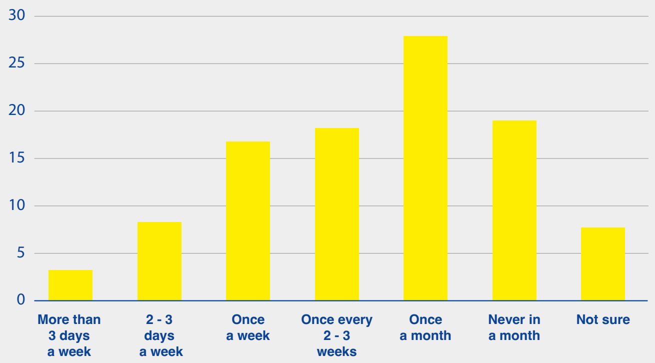
Among 25 to 34 year olds, the picture is notably warmer. A quarter (25%) trust independent pet shops' knowledge, and 28% value the personal care they offer, higher than any other age group. These are the customers who, as the earlier data confirms, are already visiting most regularly and engaging most deeply.

## How often are pet owners visiting?

Visit frequency data, gathered for the first time in 2026, provides valuable context. Over a quarter of pet owners (27%) visit their local pet shop once a month, while 18% go every two to three weeks and 17% visit weekly. At the higher end, 11% visit multiple times a week. At the other extreme, 19% said they never visit in a typical month.

The age profile of frequent visitors reinforces the pattern that has run throughout this report. Among 25 to 34 year olds, 52% visit at least once a week, making them far and away the most regular customers. This drops to 10% for over-55s, 36% of whom never visit at all. For independent retailers, the 25 to 34 demographic is the engine room of footfall, and keeping them engaged through quality products, competitive pricing and welcoming service is critical.

**Q7. How often, if at all, do you visit your local pet shop in a typical month?**



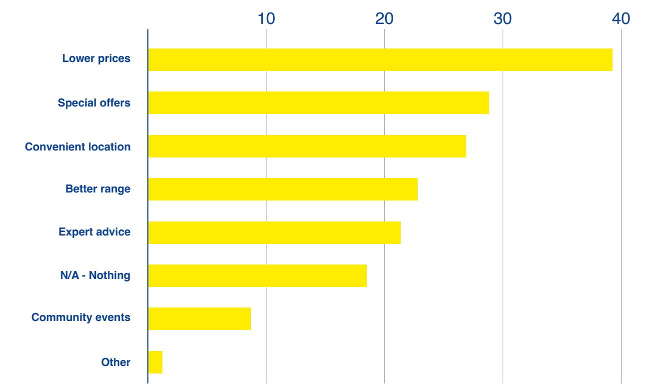

**52%** of **25 to 34 year olds**
visit their local pet shop
**at least once a week**

## What would bring more customers through the door?

Lower prices were the most commonly cited encouragement (39%), followed by special offers (28%), convenient location (26%), a better product range (23%) and expert advice (21%). Community events were mentioned by 9%.
Price-related incentives clearly matter, but they are not the whole story. Over a fifth of pet owners specifically said that expert advice would encourage them to visit more often, consistent with the broader finding that trust and knowledge are rising in importance. A quarter want a better range, suggesting that product curation and variety are key differentiators. Convenient location, while harder to control, highlights the value of visibility, clear signage, and a welcoming frontage that draws passing trade.

Special offers and promotions emerged as particularly influential for the 25 to 44 age range, where around a third cited them as a motivator. For retailers looking to retain the younger customers already coming through the door, loyalty cards, bundle deals, or seasonal promotions could convert occasional visitors into regulars.

**Q8. What, if anything, would encourage you to shop at your local pet shop more often?**



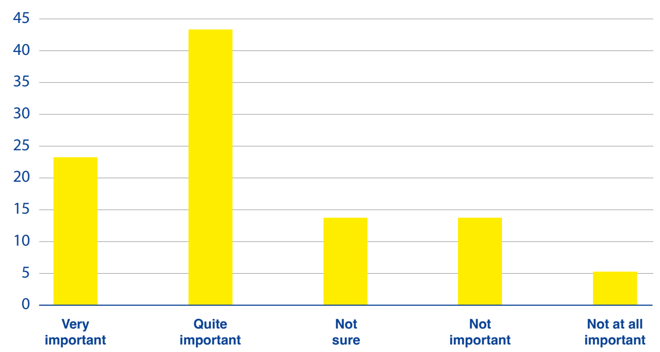

**67%** of **pet owners**
say independent pet shops are
**important to their community**

**58%** would pay more
**to support them**

## The community value of independent pet shops

Three new questions in 2026 were designed to measure the depth of feeling toward independents. The results underline the sector's importance.

**Q10. How important, if at all, is the role of independent pet shops in your community?**

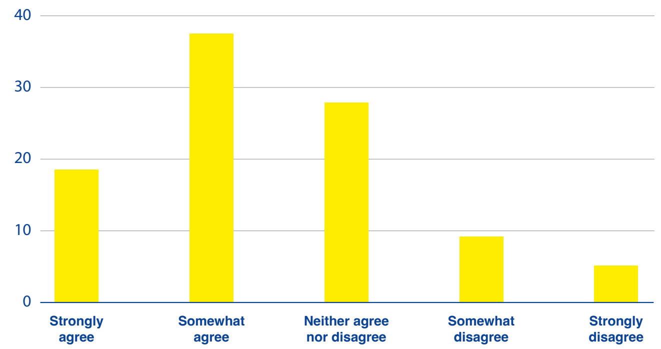



Two-thirds (67%) of all pet owners said that independent pet shops are important to their community, with 23% describing them as very important. This was highest among 25 to 34 year olds at 77%, the same group already shown to be the most frequent visitors, the most trusting, and the most emotionally invested.

When asked whether they would pay slightly more for products from a local independent to support the high street, 58% agreed. Among 25 to 34 year olds, this figure reached 76%. Even among the most price-conscious groups, a majority were willing to pay a premium if it meant keeping their local shop alive.

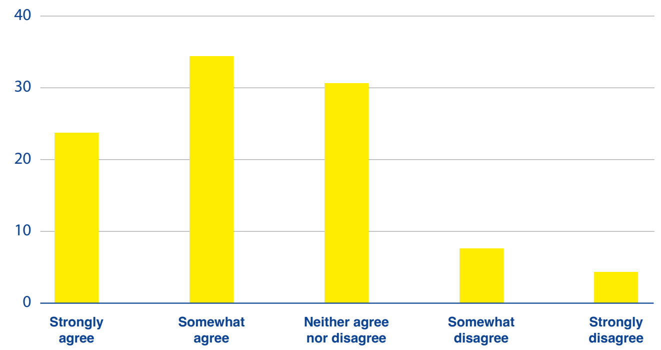
Perhaps the most powerful finding of all: 57% of pet owners said they would be upset if their local independent pet shop closed down. Among 25 to 34 year olds, this rose to 70%.

**Q11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? 'I would be prepared to pay slightly more for products bought from a local independent pet shop to support the local high street'**




These three data points, taken together, tell a story that should give every independent pet retailer confidence. Customers value what you do. They see your role in the community. Many are willing to put their money where their sentiment is. The task now is to make it easy for them to do so, through competitive pricing, visible expertise, and the kind of personal service that keeps them coming back.

**Q12. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? 'I would be upset if my local independent pet shop closed down'**



# The bond between owners and their pets

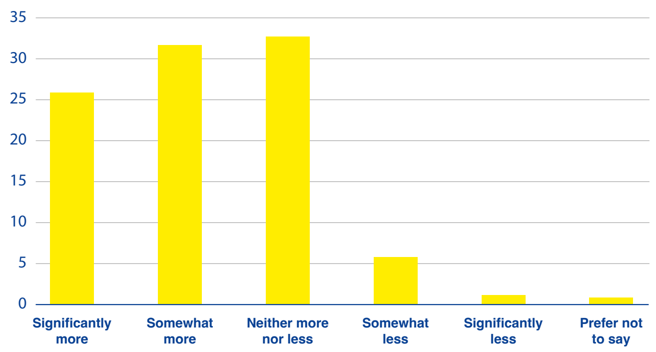
**A consistent theme throughout this report is the strength of the bond between pet owners and their animals. That emotional bond is what drives the demand for quality, the willingness to seek expert advice, and the loyalty that independent pet shops are uniquely positioned to earn.**

In 2026, 58% of respondents said they care more about their pet's wellbeing than their own, with 26% saying they cared significantly more. In 2022, 59% agreed with a similar statement, confirming that this attachment is stable over time and is not diminished by economic pressures or changing habits.

Women (62%) were more likely than men (54%) to prioritise their pet's wellbeing above their own, while 25 to 34 year olds showed the strongest attachment at 61%. Even among 18 to 24 year olds, 51% said they cared more about their pet. Just 7% overall said they cared less.

For independent pet shops, this emotional investment is commercially relevant. Owners who care deeply about their pets are not looking for the cheapest product on the shelf. They are looking for the right product, and they want to feel confident in their choice. A knowledgeable member of staff who takes the time to understand the animal's needs, and recommends accordingly, is delivering something that no algorithm or supermarket aisle can match.

**Q13. How much more, if at all, do you care about your pet's wellbeing than your own?**




**58%** of **pet owners** care more about their **pet's wellbeing** than their own

**Holding steady from 59% in 2022**

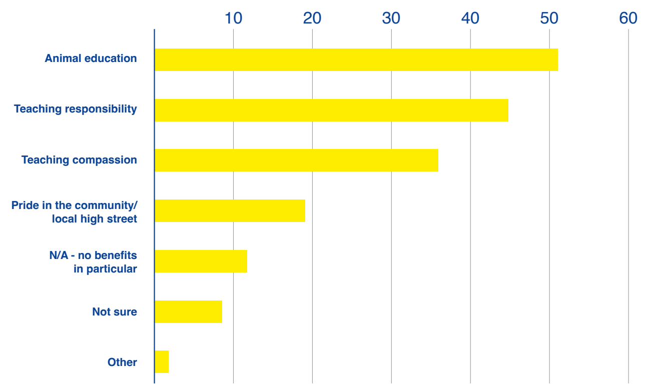
## What pet shops offer children

A new question for 2026 asked pet owners what benefits visiting a pet shop could offer children. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

Animal education was the most commonly cited benefit at 52%, followed by teaching responsibility (44%) and teaching compassion (37%). A further 19% highlighted pride in the community and the local high street. Only 11% said they saw no particular benefits.
These findings carry weight for the independent pet trade. Pet shops are more than retail spaces. They are places where families connect with animals, where children learn about care and empathy, and where the local community comes together around a shared love of pets. This is a position that is distinct to independent pet retailers.

For retailers looking to strengthen their role in the community, these results suggest real appetite for family-friendly engagement. Whether through school visit programmes, in-store animal handling sessions, or partnerships with local charities and rescue organisations, there are opportunities to deepen the relationship between pet shops and the families they serve.

**Q15. What, if any, benefits do you think visiting a pet shop could offer children?**




**52%** of **pet owners** believe visiting a pet shop **teaches children about animals**

**44%** say it **teaches responsibility**

# Conclusions

There remains a gap between how pet owners feel about independent pet shops and how frequently they visit them. The findings in this report suggest that closing that gap is achievable.

The goodwill is clear. Two-thirds of pet owners consider independent pet shops important to their communities. Nearly six in ten would pay more to support them, and a similar proportion would be upset if their local shop closed. These sentiments sit alongside a notable shift in purchasing priorities. Quality has overtaken cost as the leading driver of pet product decisions, and trust has emerged as a major factor in its own right. Pet owners are demonstrating that they value reliability, advice and confidence in what they buy.

The 25 to 34 age group represents a significant opportunity. They are the most frequent visitors to independent pet shops, express the strongest emotional connection to them, and show the greatest willingness to pay slightly more to support them. At the same time, they are among the most financially stretched, with over half having switched products for affordability in the past year. Supporting this generation means helping them balance quality and price, ensuring that products deliver genuine value rather than simply low cost.

Older pet owners present a different pattern. They are more habitual in their purchasing and less likely to visit a pet shop regularly. For this group, convenience and established routines appear to be stronger influences than sentiment or price alone. Clear differentiation and visible advice remain important in encouraging them to reconsider where they shop.

The growth of social media and AI as sources of pet information reinforces, rather than diminishes, the role of independent retailers. A substantial proportion of younger owners are encountering pet care advice online, yet 71% of all pet owners read product packaging before treating their animals. This indicates an engaged and questioning customer base. Knowledgeable staff who can interpret information clearly and confidently provide something that digital content alone cannot.

Finally, the research highlights the wider social role of independent pet shops. Many pet owners see them as places where children learn about animals, responsibility and compassion. Independent retailers occupy a position that extends beyond retail transaction into community presence.

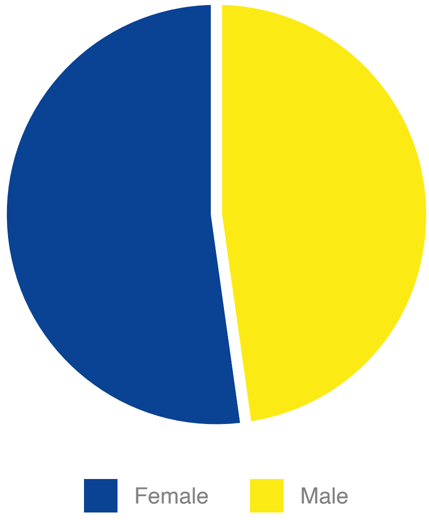
Taken together, the findings describe a customer base that is thoughtful, values quality, and recognises the contribution of independent pet retailers. The commercial opportunity lies in converting that recognition into consistent purchasing behaviour through appropriate pricing, well-curated ranges and visible advice. The foundations are in place. Building on them requires consistency and clarity rather than reinvention.

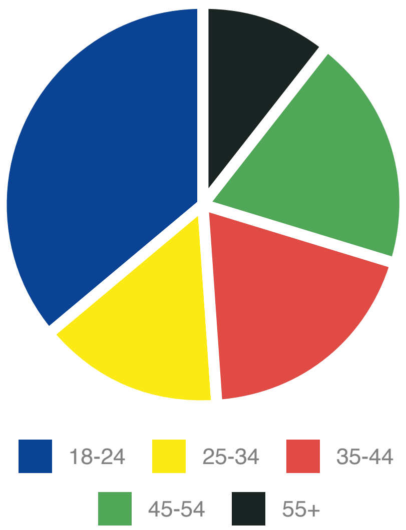
We will continue to survey the pet-owning public and share the findings with the trade. Understanding customer behaviour remains central to supporting the long-term strength of the independent pet sector.

# The survey

The survey was undertaken on behalf of Johnson's Veterinary Products Ltd. by Censuswide Ltd. We asked the questions to **1,076** UK pet owners aged 18 and above, surveyed between 25 and 27 February 2026. We began by finding out their age, gender, region and city.

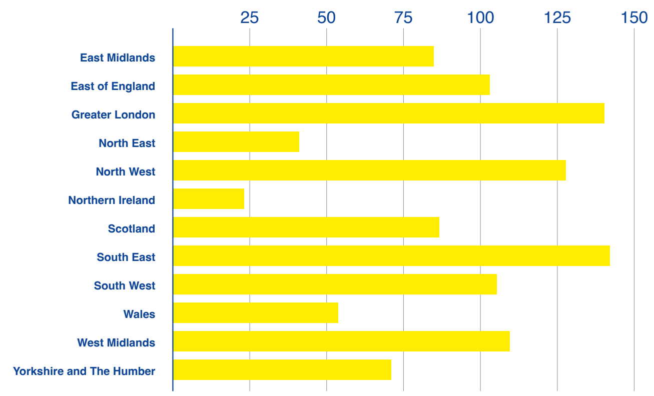
**1,076**
**UK pet owners**



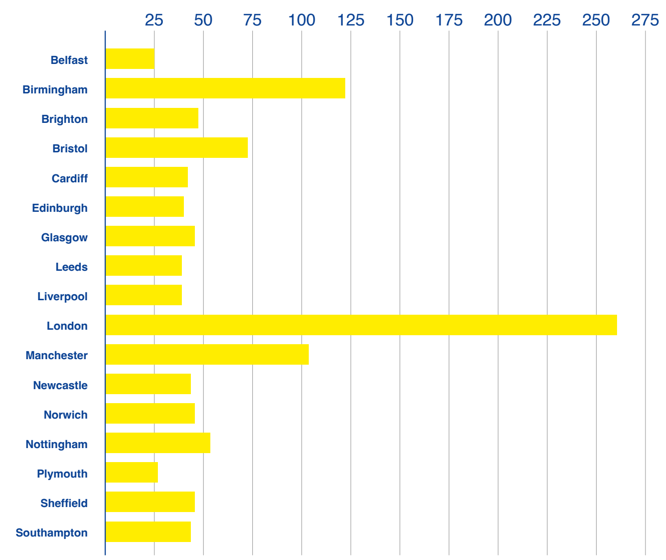

## Sampling theory, incentives & accuracy

The research was conducted online, with respondents sourced via an online access panel. All respondents are double opted in (with an opt-in and validation process) and complete a profiling questionnaire when joining. Their data is then stored anonymously and specific sectors and demographics can be targeted easily. Respondents are invited to participate in surveys via email. All surveys are incentivised according to the specialism of the panel. Rewards include points for prizes, cash, charity donations, loyalty schemes and air miles, all of which vary in value depending on the survey length. Geo-IP checks ensure respondents are completing from the right country, and cookie checks ensure the same respondent is not completing the research more than once.




## Accreditation

Censuswide.com complies with the MRS Code of Conduct which is based upon the ESOMAR principles.




## Year-on-year comparison

Four questions from this survey (Q1, Q3, Q4 and Q13) were repeated from the 2022 survey to enable tracking over time. The 2022 survey was conducted among 1,019 pet owners aged 16 and above between 18 and 22 November 2022. The 2026 survey used a minimum age of 18. Where year-on-year comparisons are drawn, this minor difference in age threshold should be noted, though it does not materially affect the findings at an aggregate level.

# The questions

**Q1. Where, if anywhere, would you go for advice if your pet got fleas? (Select all that apply)**

- Online
- Vets
- Local Pet Shop
- Ask a friend
- Use trusted products I've used before
- N/A
- Other

**Q2. How often, if at all, do you read product packaging prior to treating your pet for any issue?**

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Not sure

**Q3. What, if any, are your feelings about independent pet shops in comparison to other stockists? (Select all that apply)**

- They are knowledgeable and I trust their opinion
- They care more about me and my pet than bigger stores
- I find them overpriced
- I'd rather buy from the Vet because I trust their advice and products
- I'd rather buy from a supermarket as I can do all my grocery shopping there
- They are inconvenient as I have to make a special journey
- I'd rather shop at a major pet store chain as they offer other services on site
- N/A
- Other

**Q4. What factors most influence your purchasing decisions for pet products, if any? (Select up to 3)**

- Quality
- Cost
- Trust
- Convenience
- Reviews
- Face to face contact
- Sustainability
- Loyalty to local shops
- Want to support high street
- N/A
- Other

**Q5. What, if anything, best describes your main source of pet products?**

- Supermarket
- Vet practice
- Online
- National chain
- Independent shop
- N/A
- Other

**Q6. Which, if any, environmental factors are important to your purchasing decisions? (Select up to 3)**

- Ingredients
- Natural
- Cruelty-free
- British manufactured
- Packaging
- Organic
- Vegan friendly
- N/A
- Other

**Q7. How often, if at all, do you visit your local pet shop in a typical month?**

- More than 3 days a week
- 2-3 days a week
- Once a week
- Once every 2 to 3 weeks
- Once a month
- Never in a month
- Not sure

**Q8. What, if anything, would encourage you to shop at your local pet shop more often? (Select all that apply)**

- Lower prices
- Special offers
- Convenient location
- Better range
- Expert advice
- Community events
- N/A
- Other

**Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? 'Due to the rising cost of living, I have found myself switching pet products for affordability in the last 12 months'**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Prefer not to say

**Q10. How important, if at all, is the role of independent pet shops in your community?**

- Very important
- Quite important
- Not important
- Not at all important
- Not sure
- N/A

**Q11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? 'I would be prepared to pay slightly more for products bought from a local independent pet shop to support the local high street'**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

**Q12. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? 'I would be upset if my local independent pet shop closed down'**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

**Q13. How much more, if at all, do you care about your pet's wellbeing than your own?**

- Significantly more
- Somewhat more
- Neither more nor less
- Somewhat less
- Significantly less
- Prefer not to say

**Q14. How often, if at all, have you turned to social media (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, Facebook) or AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) for pet or pet product information?**

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Not sure

**Q15. What, if any, benefits do you think visiting a pet shop could offer children? (Select all that apply)**

- Animal education
- Teaching responsibility
- Teaching compassion
- Pride in the community/local high street
- N/A
- Not sure
- Other

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