



RSPCA Rolling Briefing

Rural Affairs, North Wales & Trefnydd
Questions

Questions to the Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales & Trefnydd

Date of Questions:	Tabled By:
9 March 2022	3.30pm on 2 March 2022

Recent Animal Welfare Updates

RSPCA's inspectorate powers explained. Following a recent high-profile incident that led to a large number of calls to our animal cruelty line, we are promoting greater understanding of the RSPCA's current inspectorate powers and how we conduct our investigations. Despite our officers presently not having any more legal powers than any other member of the public, it is often expected that we can enter a property or seize an animal, without having to undergo the relevant procedures first. While it is understandable that viral footage of animal cruelty often leads to an emotive response, we feel that greater understanding of our remit, and how it could be widened in the future, is much needed. While our officers work 365 days a year to help animals in need, we often rely on the police and local authorities to assist our investigations, which puts pressure on public services as well as meaning that animals are not always rescued as quickly as they could be. Granting inspectorate powers to the RSPCA under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 could help us operate in the way some presently expect, while helping to lighten the workload of Wales' local authorities before they are given new animal welfare legislation to enforce in the near future.

Cat welfare shouldn't come second in Wales. While statistics suggest that dogs are our most commonly-owned pet with 33% of households in Wales having canine companions, it is important that cats are not forgotten about when it comes to the prioritisation of animal welfare legislation in Wales. RSPCA Cymru has long called for the regulation of cat breeding in Wales to build upon the ban on the third party sale of kittens. While it was confirmed that the Welsh Government will consider introducing compulsory microchipping for kittens and cats in the recently published Animal Welfare Plan for Wales, we are calling for this to become a firm commitment to ensure that Wales does not fall behind England, who are set to introduce compulsory microchipping for cats in 2023. With issues related to the welfare and breeding of cats, such as the breeding of 'hybrid' cats, having hit the headlines recently, RSPCA Cymru is calling for more focus on cat welfare in Welsh policy to ensure that felines are given the protection they need and deserve in Wales.

The mistreatment of farm animals has no place in Wales. On February 14, a BBC Panorama documentary aired featuring distressing footage of the mistreatment of cows at a dairy farm in South West Wales. While many farmers in Wales work hard to take care of their animals, viral cases of animal abuse on farms risk tarnishing the reputation of the industry, and its workers, as a whole. Because of this, it is more important than ever that farmers who adhere to higher-welfare standards are recognised and rewarded via the incoming Sustainable Farming Scheme and for good husbandry and higher-welfare practices to be incentivised in Wales to give the public the assurances they need when it comes to making ethical food choices.

Dogs should be friends, not trends. With Crufts taking place between 10-13 March, issues surrounding the breeding of brachycephalic (flat-faced) dogs, and others that are bred to look a certain way, are set to become a talking point once again. With recent events in Norway ruling that the breeding of certain types is in violation of their animal protection laws, discussions about the future of certain breeds in Wales and throughout the UK are sure to arise in the coming months. With the demand for some breeds of dog having reached unprecedented heights in recent years, RSPCA Cymru is among the organisations who are concerned about the recent emergence of canine fertility clinics which offer services and procedures, as well as access to substances, that should only be carried out and distributed by qualified veterinary personnel, at the hands of untrained staff. With new figures from the RSPCA showing that dog-related trends such as ear cropping are more prevalent than ever, we are continuing our calls for the Welsh Government to issue public awareness campaigns on responsible dog buying and ownership to further protect dog welfare in Wales.

Calls continue for statutory powers for RSPCA officers

The RSPCA's specific investigation and prosecution powers have received much attention in recent weeks, following our involvement in a high-profile incident which led to two cats coming into our care. With the public reacting strongly to this case as social media footage of the incident in question went viral, our phone lines experienced an extremely busy period as we were called upon to investigate. While we routinely investigate and prosecute animal cruelty reported to us by members of the public who are concerned about the welfare of animals, we're often asked how this process works and why it takes time before we can take specific actions or prosecute. As it stands, we have no special powers to gather the evidence we need to commence our investigation process, which often includes speaking to and taking statements from witnesses, collecting evidence such as photographs, CCTV or videos and seeking advice from experts such as vets. To assist with the public's understanding of our investigation process, our vice-president Chris Packham hosted a [live Facebook Q&A with one of our inspectors on February 13](#).

We have long called for our inspectorate officers to be granted statutory powers in Wales under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. This would bring us in line with other sister organisations across the British Isles, such as the Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), whose officers have the power to search and enter properties under warrant, seize animals and issue Animal Welfare Notices. In 2019, the RSPCA submitted a report to the Welsh Government which explored the appointment of RSPCA inspectors formally under the Animal Welfare Act, which provides the legal basis for around 85 percent of investigations for animal cruelty. This work was understandably paused as a result of the pandemic and we are now updating this report on what measures we have taken in the past two years. We hope the Welsh Government will progress this issue in 2022 and beyond to enable the RSPCA to be better equipped and accountable in order to bring the enforcement work of all agencies closer together, as well as ease the historic bureaucratic burden placed on other public bodies.

The current focus on the RSPCA's remit coincides with the Welsh Government's recent announcement of increased funding for Wales' local authorities under the local government settlement for 2022 to 2023¹. While any increase in funding for Wales' 22 local authorities is much welcome, it is vital that they are given the ongoing funding and physical resources needed to enforce current and future animal welfare legislation. Wales' local authorities play a vital role in the enforcement of a number of animal welfare laws despite facing considerable budget and resource challenges in recent years. Local authorities are responsible for the enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act in Wales through the licensing and regulation of businesses and activities involving animals, as well as devolved legislation such as the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021 and the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014; with further responsibilities for councils anticipated given ongoing legislative and policy developments.

Indeed, enforcing animal welfare legislation set by the Welsh Government is set to become an increasingly demanding task with local authorities set to get additional duties which could include the licensing of animal exhibits and animal welfare establishments along with the possibility of compulsory microchipping of cats and more. The UK Government's Kept Animal Bill could also see councils become responsible for enforcing bans on primate ownership and improvements to zoo regulations, as well as potentially needing to tackle livestock worrying, puppy smuggling and live exports too. RSPCA Cymru believes there is a need for an urgent wholesale review concerning the ability of local authorities to enforce legislation that impacts upon the welfare of animals in Wales, with the list of enforceable animal welfare legislation ever growing. With Wales' public services still working under significant resource and budgetary constraints, support for granting inspectorate powers to the RSPCA in the Welsh Government's eventual response to our 2019 report could help ease the pressure on stretched public bodies in Wales.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Can the Minister confirm how she will be reviewing the impact of new funding and training for local authorities on improving the enforcement of animal welfare legislation in Wales?**
- 2. What assessment has the Welsh Government made of how the local government settlement will support local authorities with the enforcement of animal welfare legislation in Wales?**
- 3. How will the implementation of the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales and the animal welfare-related commitments featured in the Programme for Government be funded, with a particular view to the additional enforcement responsibilities set to be placed on local government?**

¹ Written Statement - [Provisional Local Government Settlement 2022-23](#), 21 December 2021

Cat welfare must not be forgotten

Wales is rightly known as a nation of animal lovers, with 33% of households owning canine companions and 21% of households keeping feline friends, according to the most recent results of the National Survey for Wales². The problems related to dog welfare in Wales are well-established, with efforts to reverse our previous reputation as the 'puppy farming capital of the UK' well underway following the introduction of the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021 (LAIAR) back in September. While LAIAR includes a ban on the third-party selling of kittens as well as puppies, RSPCA Cymru is calling for greater focus on cat welfare from the Welsh Government to ensure that these popular pets are not left behind. Over a decade ago, some 347 cat breeders were identified in Wales³, with the current figure potentially higher following increased demand for pets in recent years. Unlike in Scotland, cat breeders are not currently required to undergo licensing or welfare oversight in Wales, much to the concern of RSPCA Cymru. This means that there are no specific legal safeguards in place for kittens until they are ready to be sold, or the cats that they are bred from, other than general requirements under Animal Welfare Act 2006.

While the profits involved in cat breeding are generally thought to be lower than dog breeding, it can still be a very profitable enterprise with some breeds of pedigree cats costing £1,000+ per kitten. Part-wild hybrid breeds such as the savannah cat, a cross between a domestic cat and an African serval, can fetch up to £20,000 a kitten⁴, with campaigners' calls for such breeds to be banned particularly high at present following recent social media-fuelled rises in their popularity. Estimates suggest there are currently 259 small and medium exotic cats licensed under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act in the UK, with a large number of these cats likely used for breeding hybrid cats such as the savannah⁵. Many animal welfare organisations, including the RSPCA, consider part-wild cats unsuitable for most domestic settings due to their complex needs, which are essentially no different to the same species living in the wild, and can lead to them needing to be rehomed if owners struggle to cope. While owners actually require a Dangerous Wild Animals Act licence to own some savannah cats, not all part-wild cat hybrids require a licence to own, so the true scale of the problem is unknown. It has been recently suggested that the UK Government will consider whether there is a need to introduce licensing arrangements for cat breeders, including restrictions on the breeding of certain types of cats, as part of the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018⁶. With issues related to cat breeding devolved to the Welsh Government, we are calling for a similar consideration of felines in Wales, along with a wider review of the keeping and trade of exotic animals kept as pets, to ensure that Wales does not become a future haven for unscrupulous cat breeders,

Compulsory microchipping is a further example of where legislation between cats and dogs currently differs in Wales. While the compulsory microchipping of dogs has been in force in Wales since 2015, there are no firm commitments relevant to cat microchipping in place as of yet. Cats roam by their nature, and a microchip increases the chances of a lost or injured cat being reunited with their owner. Similarly, if a cat has been involved in a road traffic accident, a microchip allows the relevant local authorities to inform the owner, helping to prevent further distress for those involved. According to the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales, the Welsh Government has conducted research with the UK and Scottish Governments on the potential benefits of the compulsory microchipping of kittens and cats, with 'extending compulsory microchipping to include kittens and cats' cited as a potential consideration⁷. While there would be numerous challenges regarding the enforcement of such a law, RSPCA Cymru strongly believes that the Welsh Government should make the microchipping, and upkeep of owner contact databases, of owned cats compulsory. Late last year, it was announced that the UK Government will make cat microchipping mandatory in England to help reunite lost and stray pets with their owners⁸ and will announce a package of measures this year to improve how databases work. It is vital that the Welsh Government makes a similar commitment to ensure that cat welfare is granted the attention it much needs in Wales.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Can the Minister confirm if the Welsh Government is considering introducing regulations for cat breeders to bring them in line with dog breeders in Wales?**
- 2. Is the Welsh Government considering introducing restrictions on the keeping and trading of exotic wild animals being kept as pets, such as part-wild cats such as the savannah?**
- 3. What further evidence would the Welsh Government need to commit to the compulsory microchipping of cats in Wales, with England set to introduce such rules in 2023?**

² National Survey for Wales [early data: April to June 2021, 14 October 2021](#)

³ Cynllun Gwella Lles Anifeiliaid Anwes – Prosiect Arbennig: Bridio Cathod

⁴ Wild Heart Sanctuary - [Putting an end to the practice of breeding exotic wildcats with domestic cats in the UK](#), accessed 28 February 2022

⁵ Born Free - Exotic pets on the rise in Britain, 1 March 2021

⁶ The Guardian - [UK could ban part-wild hybrid cats after social media fuels boom in popularity](#), 17 February 2022

⁷ Welsh Government - [Animal Welfare Plan for Wales 2021 to 2026](#)

⁸ UK Government - [Cat microchipping to be made mandatory](#), 4 December 2021

Wales must reward highest welfare in agriculture

Following the airing of a BBC Panorama documentary on February 14, we received a number of calls to our animal cruelty line from distressed members of the public concerning footage of the mistreatment of cows at a dairy farm in South West Wales. The distressing footage appeared to show workers' punching, kicking and hitting cows with shovels, as well as using a hip hoist to move a non-ambulatory animal without full body support⁹. The documentary has resulted in the relevant local authority, who have statutory powers to investigate, conducting an investigation into the farm and its workers, and we hope that this will be looked into as a matter of priority. With good husbandry practices playing a key role in our own farm assurance scheme, RSPCA Assured, we know that many farmers work hard to care for their animals, which makes it all the more concerning that incidents such as this risk tarring the reputation of Wales' treatment of agricultural animals and undermining the importance of the Welsh Government's future framework, anticipated under an Agriculture (Wales) Bill, to incentivise and celebrate higher welfare standards.

As it stands, approximately 53,000 people work within Wales' agricultural sector¹⁰. With the long-term sustainability of the agricultural industry in Wales currently facing an uncertain future as a result of the incoming Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Australia, and with the potential for others to be signed with countries such as New Zealand and India in the near future, it is vital that farmers who adhere to higher welfare standards are supported and rewarded, especially given the additional costs associated with higher-welfare practices. Production methods with higher animal welfare standards can be more costly than more intensive systems, with this typically resulting in higher purchasing costs for the consumer. The unrestricted importation of cheaper, lower-welfare produce from countries such as Australia could lead to more intense competition between imported and domestic produce and it is imperative that Welsh farmers are not required to cut costs and sacrifice the welfare of their animals to compete with cheaper imports. As it stands, the rise in the availability of these products could place higher-welfare domestic produce at a significant disadvantage, much to the concern of the RSPCA. With FTAs potentially pressuring farmers into lowering their standards to compete with cheaper produce, it is imperative that both the UK and Welsh Governments ensure that Wales' higher domestic animal welfare standards do not become a casualty of such agreements. To ensure that animal welfare standards are adhered to, it is vital that farmers are incentivised to produce higher-welfare products via the incoming Sustainable Farming Scheme.

When questioned about the priorities for the Sustainable Farming Scheme during the last round of Ministerial questions on February 2, 'tackling the climate and nature emergencies, alongside the sustainable production of food' were cited as the key objectives of the Sustainable Farming Scheme¹¹, by the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales and Trefnydd, with no specific mention of the role animal welfare, or incentivising higher-welfare produce, will play in the scheme. While rewarding the prevention of disease and good levels of biosecurity on farms was included within the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework's (WAHWF) recently published Implementation Plan, RSPCA Cymru is continuing its calls for future post-Brexit farm payments to be clearly linked to good husbandry and higher welfare practices too. With footage such as that featured within the aforementioned Panorama documentary having the potential to damage the public's trust in the farming sector in Wales, farmers who go above and beyond to ensure higher welfare standards on their farms should be both recognised and rewarded, and given the opportunity to reap the potential benefits of their efforts. According to RSPCA research, 80 percent of adults in Wales say the welfare standards of the animals reared is important in their purchasing decisions¹², while 72 percent would pay more for products from animal welfare-friendly production systems¹³, showing how a focus on high-welfare standards can contribute to the long-term profitability and vitality of our agricultural industry. Because of this, clarification on whether the incoming Sustainable Farming Scheme will include a specific focus on animal welfare is urgently needed, to give assurances to farmers who prioritise good husbandry practices, as well as the animal welfare sector.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Can the Minister provide an update on when compulsory CCTV in abattoirs will come into force in Wales to help better protect farm animal welfare?**
- 2. Can the Minister confirm if the incident filmed on the dairy farm in Wales by the BBC is being investigated?**
- 3. How does the Welsh Government plan to assist farmers under the Sustainable Farming Scheme to incentivise higher animal welfare standards and give the public the assurances they need in order to make ethical food choices?**

⁹ The Independent - Farmers beat cows with spaders in disturbing BBC Panorama episode

¹⁰ Welsh Government Statistical Release - June 2020 Survey of Agriculture and Horticulture: Results for Wales, 17 December 2020

¹¹ Record of Proceedings, 2 February 2022

¹² YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,001 Welsh adults (aged 18+). Fieldwork was undertaken between 4–8 September 2014. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Welsh adults (aged 18+)

¹³ European Commission, 2016. Attitudes of Europeans towards animal welfare. Special Eurobarometer 442

Dog welfare - friends, not trends

The welfare issues associated with the breeding of brachycephalic (flat-faced) dogs and others with exaggerated features are set to become a topic of discussion once again, with Crufts set to take place between 10-13 of March. While brachycephalic breeds such as bulldogs and pugs are at greater risk of life-limiting illness such as breathing problems, heart conditions, skin and eye diseases, spinal abnormalities and joint disease, demand for these breeds is still high in Wales and throughout the UK. The trend for certain dogs is particularly evident on social media platforms, with consumer brands and advertisers also using these animals as focal points in mass marketing campaigns, fueling the consumer desire for flat-faced breeds while normalising the features which can severely affect welfare. Despite the health issues they experience, these dogs continue to compete in high-profile dog shows like Crufts, with the RSPCA launching a behaviour change campaign to coincide with the airing of the show in the coming weeks to raise awareness of the issues associated with the breeding of these dogs.

With the welfare issues associated with certain dog breeds a concern across the global animal welfare sector, Norway has recently ruled that the breeding of brachycephalic English bulldogs along with the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel is in breach of their animal protection laws. The Oslo district court has banned the breeding of these two purebreds on the grounds that it inflicts harm on them¹⁴. With the breeding of these dogs, and others, fuelled by consumer demand having reached unprecedented heights in recent years, we await to see if other countries will follow a similar approach in the near future to protect dog welfare and reduce the suffering of those that are prone to serious health issues.

While the UK Government is currently considering the aforementioned restrictions on the breeding of certain types of cats in England, there are no plans in place for such as focus on brachycephalic dogs in either England or Wales as it stands, with the breeding of these dogs currently being amplified even further by unregulated canine fertility clinics. Canine fertility clinics offer services such as artificial insemination, ultrasound scanning, dog breeding and ovulation testing, with dogs who are unable to breed naturally because of health issues amongst their clientele. The RSPCA is among the many animal welfare organisations who are concerned about the recent rise in these establishments in Wales as they are not currently subject to licensing in either England or Wales, despite them offering procedures and substances that should only be carried out and distributed by qualified veterinary personnel. With a number of these clinics having recently opened their doors in Wales, we are concerned about the connections between such establishments and ear cropping, which has also seen a rise in Wales in the past year. Because of this, we are calling for a clear statement from the CVO that fertility procedures are a veterinary act and anyone undertaking such procedures must be a veterinarian. We are also calling for such clinics to be licensed under any potential expansion of LAIAR or review of Wales' dog breeding regulations in the future.

As well as the popularity of brachycephalic dogs, other concerning dog-related trends are also on the rise according to RSPCA's newest figures. In 2021, RSPCA investigators received 188 reports related to illegal ear cropping across England and Wales - an 86% increase on the 101 reports in 2020. Since 2015, when record keeping began, reports to the RSPCA have soared 1,243% - with only 14 reports received by us in 2015. Because of our concerns about ear cropping following the airing of a BBC Wales documentary late last year which suggested that unscrupulous traders are routinely offering puppies with cropped ears for sale in Wales, we've teamed up with Hope Rescue on a joint-letter to the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd. Within our letter, we have offered to work with the Welsh Government on a public awareness campaign to reduce the demand for dogs with cropped ears in Wales to help to send a strong message that the illegal mutilation of dogs for cosmetic reasons is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. While we await a response from the Minister, we are continuing our calls for the Welsh Government to consider working with the sector on the provision of regular campaigns relevant to responsible pet ownership, to help reduce the demand for dogs with cropped ears, and others who are prone to the health problems associated with overbreeding.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Does the Minister agree that procedures undertaken in animal fertility clinics are a veterinary procedure and can only be performed by suitably trained personnel?**
- 2. Does the Welsh Government have any plans to tackle the breeding of certain dogs in Wales following Norway's recent decision to ban the breeding of English bulldogs and the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel?**
- 3. Can the Minister commit to the provision of regular public awareness campaigns in relation to responsible dog ownership by the Welsh Government?**

¹⁴ WIONews - [Norway court bans breeding of Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, British bulldogs](#), 22 February 2022

RSPCA Cymru incidents, November 2021 - January 2022

From November 2021 to January 2022, the RSPCA responded to 3,357 incidents across Wales - an 9.2 percent increase on the same time period last year; with Covid-19 restrictions now significantly eased and people spending more time out and about. This marks an increased degree of normality on the frontline, after a decline in calls to the RSPCA's emergency line amid restrictions as people spent more time at home.

Local Authority	November 2021 - January 2022	November 2020 - January 2021
Blaenau Gwent	85	76
Bridgend	140	115
Caerphilly	166	136
Cardiff	358	278
Carmarthenshire	216	247
Ceredigion	58	60
Conwy	154	157
Denbighshire	127	117
Flintshire	162	145
Gwynedd	124	134
Isle of Anglesey	81	83
Merthyr Tydfil	73	55
Monmouthshire	100	73
Neath Port Talbot	173	149
Newport	214	184
Pembrokeshire	126	129
Powys	127	142
Rhondda Cynon Taff	207	150
Swansea	310	311
The Vale of Glamorgan	116	115
Torfaen	100	79
Wrexham	140	139
TOTAL	3,357	3,074

More information on the work of the RSPCA, and bespoke briefings on all of our campaigns can be found on the [PoliticalAnimal website](http://PoliticalAnimal.wales) - a dedicated resource for politicians and their staff. The news issue also features updates per Senedd region which may prove useful for supplementary questions.