



Briefing document

Welsh Government's Chief Statistician briefing The importance of Welsh Government statistics and animal welfare policy to RSPCA Cymru

July 2019

Background

RSPCA Cymru has long highlighted the importance of animal welfare data. Obtaining, mining and analysing relevant data can prove imperative in informing the state of animal welfare in Wales - and, as such, we continue to emphasise the potential importance of large-scale surveys commissioned by Welsh Government in furthering these aims¹.

In 2015, RSPCA Cymru provided a [consultation response to the Welsh Government on a 'New Approach to Surveys' in Wales](#). As previously noted, the RSPCA very much welcomes the Welsh Government's focus on animal welfare - and believe such surveys are well-placed to provide a clear evidence base for informing the need for policy development and raising awareness of the key issues which impact upon animals.

The inclusion of animal related questions in the 2014-2015 National Survey for Wales - the first time since the pilot survey in 2009-2010 - was a positive development and has provided us with invaluable baseline data. However, due to its age, such data is becoming harder to use. Accordingly, RSPCA Cymru welcomes the prospect of annual animal questions being asked in future surveys, helping to further inform our policy developments and providing more coverage for an issue which is so important to people across Wales.

How does RSPCA Cymru use the National Survey for Wales data?

Previous National Survey for Wales data is regularly used by RSPCA Cymru to help inform our own policy developments, or explain animal welfare matters to the general public. Examples of the survey data in RSPCA publications include:

- RSPCA consultation responses to Welsh Government
- RSPCA consultation responses to Local Authorities
- Briefings to political stakeholders and decision-makers
- Briefings to Assembly Members and Committees
- Briefings to Local Authority elected representatives and officials
- The [RSPCA Political Animal website](#) - an online tool for political decision-makers

¹ RSPCA Cymru - [New Approach to Surveys Consultation Response \(2015\)](#)

- RSPCA publications, including our Annual Summaries and Animal Welfare Indicators
- RSPCA Cymru press releases, social media posts and other public-facing communications

Case Study One - Introducing a Ban on Pets as Prizes on Council Owned Land

The RSPCA has recently been working closely with one of Wales' Local Authorities seeking to implement a ban on pets being given as prizes on Council owned land. While pets as prizes covers a range of species, the majority of these cases involve goldfish being given out at fairgrounds and at similar attractions.

RSPCA Cymru drew heavily on the National Survey for Wales in our briefing to Councillors, highlighting that based on the 2014-2015 findings, 14% of households in Wales owned a fish, suggesting that for many individuals fish can make excellent companion animals. We expect the Motion banning pets as prizes to gain cross-party support within the Council and will see real policy change introduced at the local level, in part due to the use of statistics provided by the National Survey.

Case Study Two - Welsh Government Curriculum Consultation 2019

RSPCA Cymru submitted a consultation response on the Welsh Government's proposed curriculum on 16 July 2019. Within the response we utilised data from the 2014-2015 National Survey for Wales which stated that 47% of households in Wales owned a pet. By using this data, the RSPCA was able to prove the scale of pet ownership in Wales. Accordingly, it is vital that young people receive animal welfare education as part of the new curriculum to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities to the animals they live with, and as future pet owners. Equally, with 53% of households in Wales not owning a pet of any kind, we further argued that the incorporation of animal welfare education into the curriculum is vital so that those who have little or no exposure to caring for an animal get an understanding of how to be kind, compassionate and responsible to animals and their peers alike².

Case Study Three - Compulsory Microchipping of Dogs

In 2015, Wales passed [the Microchipping of Dogs \(Wales\) Regulations 2015](#), which saw the microchipping of dogs older than eight-weeks-old made compulsory in Wales.

Such a legislative change marked a big shift towards improved animal welfare in Wales, particularly in the form of responsible dog ownership. RSPCA Cymru again utilised the National Survey for Wales 2014-2015 findings as it provided clear baseline data on the percentage of dogs that were microchipped prior to the ban - and highlighting the scale of the challenge in improving microchipping rates. While third party surveys suggest rates have increased significantly³, further Welsh Government survey would provide a clear comparator and an evidence base as to the success of this legislation.

² RSPCA Cymru - [Welsh Curriculum Guidance 2022 Consultation Response](#)

³ BBC News - [Dog Microchipping rose to 94% following a change in the law](#), 1 May 2017

Animal Welfare Questions We Would Like to See Included

RSPCA Cymru would like to see the following questions included in the National Survey for Wales questionnaire on an annual basis:

- Does anyone in your household own any pets?
- How many pets do you own?
- Which pets does your household own? (including a species breakdown)
- Did you get this pet in the last five years?
- Where did you get this pet from?
- Is your pet(s) insured? (providing a species breakdown)
- Is your pet(s) microchipped? (providing a species breakdown)
- Is your pet(s) neutered? (providing a species breakdown)
- Do you keep any other animals, not within your household (e.g. livestock, birds etc)?
- Where do you get your animal welfare advice? (e.g. vets, Welsh Government Codes of Practice, animal welfare charities)

RSPCA Cymru continues to support mapping findings on a geographical basis, possibly via the Assembly electoral regions. This could help RSPCA Cymru assist with targeting educational and awareness campaigns, as well as furthering collaboration with the Local Authorities across Wales.

Conclusion

2018 saw a five-year high in prosecution rates for the RSPCA in Wales, highlighting the need for an increased focus on prevention, and policy development, to further the animal welfare agenda in Wales. The inclusion of annual animal welfare questions in the National Survey for Wales will play a significant role in assisting in the formulation of policy change that aim to improve the welfare of animals across Wales. This could assist in preventative and education work, and how positive approaches to animal welfare can assist in tackling social challenges. Additionally, their inclusion will produce the baseline data that can be used to scrutinise policy changes and will allow for policy evaluations to be made. We also believe this would assist public bodies with their requirements under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, given the role animal ownership can play in furthering an individual's health and wellbeing - with consistent, annual statistics developing a strong evidence base and the availability of trends.