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# Contingency planning

A GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE

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## TO FIND OUT MORE:

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## Celebrating good practice

The RSPCA's PawPrints (formerly Community Animal Welfare Footprints) Awards have been running for the past 10 years to recognise and promote the work of local authorities, housing providers, local resilience forums and the police in England and Wales who demonstrate good practice in animal welfare services. The Awards focus on five key areas: housing; licensing of animal activities; stray dogs; welfare of kennelled dogs; and the subject of this guide – contingency planning.

As the Awards enter their second decade, they continue to be the only scheme that recognises the commitment and achievement of local authorities, housing providers and contingency planners across England and Wales who have continued to deliver and improve animal welfare. This guide to good practice explains what lessons have been learnt from our many years' experience as well as providing some key pointers to make sure animal welfare is always considered when planning for emergencies.

Local resilience forums (LRFs) and local authorities can be awarded a bronze, silver and gold level award where they clearly consider animals in their emergency planning processes, with the criteria for the Awards developed by RSPCA scientists and experts from the wider animal welfare sphere. This booklet provides guidance on what makes a good contingency planning policy and highlights some practical examples, demonstrated by our past winners, of the importance of considering animals such as pets and livestock in emergency planning.

Planning makes perfect and the RSPCA hopes this guide will inspire other LRFs and local authorities to review and improve their current policies and practices. Hopefully, as a result of following the guidance in this booklet, you will be encouraged to promote your good work and to seek recognition through the PawPrints Award scheme in future.

As part of the RSPCA's commitment to key stakeholders who directly affect the welfare of animals, we have a dedicated 24-hour local authority line to report concerns of cruelty or to seek advice. Please note this number must not be given out to members of the public and only be used by local authority staff. The number is: **0300 123 8007**





# Including animal welfare in contingency planning – why is it so important?

Across England and Wales, it is estimated that between 45 and 47 percent of homes have at least one pet. Pet ownership is incredibly popular and there are an increasing number of studies indicating that owning a pet can be beneficial to people's health generally. For example, the bond between a person and their pet can increase fitness, lower stress, and bring happiness to their owner. As a result, often when faced with an emergency and evacuation, many pet owners will refuse to leave their animals behind.

At present, local authorities in England and Wales are not required by law to consider companion and other animals' welfare as a part of the contingency planning process, however, there is a legal responsibility on the owner to care for their animals' welfare needs under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

With the frequency of extreme weather incidents such as flooding on the rise in the UK, the need to consider animals as part of the planning process is absolutely vital. It is important to have a contingency planning document and to practise exercises that include animals to ensure effective preparation for emergency situations.

Working with animal welfare organisations and other experts in contingency exercises and planning – and undertaking proactive education within communities – can play a key role in ensuring a locality is resilient to the threat that emergency situations pose to animals. As is often the case, multi-agency working is the most effective way forward, so this good practice guide seeks to cover some of the key considerations and provide a blueprint for local authorities to follow.

While human welfare will always remain the priority, there must be provision for animals. When owners know their animals will be safe it is often easier to evacuate them from their homes.

Any contingency plan should be designed to consider the welfare needs of any animals that may need to be evacuated too.

That said, the RSPCA strongly advises that no one should put their own safety at risk for an animal in any circumstances and always ask for assistance from professionals.

## Case study:

### Association of Greater Manchester Authorities Civil Contingencies and Resilience Unit (AGMA CCRU) – the 3Ps

AGMA CCRU won the prestigious Innovator Award in 2013 for their work in pooling their experiences after the tragic 2012 gas explosion in Oldham. The Unit created a plan to embed animal welfare concerns into emergency and contingency planning across all 10 local authorities covering Greater Manchester. The pioneering plan, which focuses on what key priorities should be when faced with a major emergency, was called the 3Ps; people, pets, possessions. This approach has been adopted by other local authorities, and means pets are now a priority in the emergency response plans of many more areas.



# Contingency planning – the basics

## Be prepared!

Creating a clear and effective policy covering animals and animal welfare should be a starting point to any contingency planning policy. The RSPCA believes animals should be considered as part of the contingency planning process in all situations. Whether it's considering a power station, a fire, explosion or flood, a policy does not need to be detailed, but it should ensure provision could be made for the welfare of people's pets and/or livestock in a range of situations.

A basic policy should include information about locations identified as temporary animal shelters. The sites should be assessed by the local authority before an emergency situation arises to ensure they meet the welfare needs of animals as defined by section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Codes of practice prepared by both the Welsh Government and Defra for some animal species provide detailed information and practical guidance on what this means in practice.

Contingency planners will also need to consider the wide variety of species that can be kept as pets and their specific welfare needs. For example, people often keep more exotic species such as birds, reptiles and amphibians, or mammals – not just cats and dogs – and they will have different species-specific requirements that would need to be met in temporary accommodation. Consideration also needs to be made for other animals, such as livestock and horses.

## Information is key

Firstly, a key action is ensuring guidance is provided for residents in the area, explaining how to respond and prepare should the need to evacuate arise. In addition, most local authorities will have information on their websites for pet and livestock owners

(commercial and non-commercial) including lists of essential items to ensure the welfare of animals. Whilst these lists often include items such as food, bedding and toys, the RSPCA would suggest that vaccination records are also included should animals, for example, need to be housed in a boarding establishment as these require vaccination records.

Consideration should also be given as to whether friends or family outside a potential risk zone can look after pets. Dog owners should ensure collars and tags with their details are worn by their dogs when in public and, as required by law, all dogs should be microchipped with up-to-date information registered on the database.

## Keep a record

The RSPCA recommends local authorities and housing providers keep records of companion animals living in their accommodation in the form of a simple register, which is kept up to date. This is to help first responders know whether there are any animals in a property before they enter and to ensure the owner will not risk their own safety or hamper recovery efforts by returning to an evacuated building.

## Creating contact lists

Knowing which businesses and organisations can help in an emergency is vital. Some local authorities have links with animal welfare organisations and vets and they will have been involved in practice exercises, whilst some LRFs will also collate information to share with the wider group. Get to know the local animal welfare groups and local vets and understand how they could help in an emergency. Where planners know in advance the capabilities and resources of different partner organisations, time can be saved during an emergency situation.

## Case study:

### Pendle Borough Council – PetSafe

PetSafe is a way for pet owners who are suddenly and unexpectedly taken into care to ensure first responders are made aware of their animals. Pendle had identified that, in the immediate aftermath of such an emergency situation, pets were often forgotten about or simply not even known of. The scheme consists of a simple form, which can be pinned up in the home, as well as a portable credit card-sized version that informs first responders of what animals the person owns and, where possible, identifies an emergency pet carer. This means the animals' welfare needs can be more quickly provided for and council animal welfare staff alerted as soon as possible. This simple scheme provides for peace of mind for Pendle residents as well as improved care in emergency situations for their animals.









# RSPCA support for contingency planners in their planning and execution

## Planning

Being prepared and planning ahead is vital in contingency planning. The RSPCA attends meetings with LRFs across England and Wales to help them prepare plans and evacuation centres. As an animal welfare charity that also carries out flooding and cliff rescues, we want to share our expertise with local authorities to ensure animal welfare is considered in the planning process and those plans are accurate and updated with the latest animal welfare thinking.

## Live exercises

Whilst the hope is that a contingency plan never needs to be put into action, realistically this cannot be guaranteed, and live exercises will prepare responders to deal with emergencies. We recognise undertaking such exercises can be costly, but the RSPCA encourages either table-top or live exercises as part of the planning every year, which should always include an animal welfare element, regardless of the scenario. We actively take part in contingency exercises to enable staff to deliver plans smoothly should the event arise.

## Communication

Educating the public on what to do and how to prepare for emergency situations can assist LRFs. This could be done through information leaflets and written communication or through events. An event run by a local authority, such as an awareness day on microchipping or neutering, could be used to share information on emergency planning. Information should be concise, with clear advice for pet and livestock owners to follow in an emergency situation.

## Temporary boarding

Ensuring a safe and suitable environment for an animal following a rescue is an important issue when planning for emergencies. While the RSPCA can assist as first responders during rescues we

have limited resources and may not be able to provide boarding for animals in an emergency. Some local authorities and LRFs have collaborated and purchased vari-kennels, whilst some local authorities and housing providers have a list of people willing to take care of animals during incidents or have arrangements with local boarding kennels and catteries. However, it must be remembered that these establishments may also be affected by the emergency and may not be able to help.

## Case study:

### Monmouthshire County Council – Operation Jurassic Spark

Monmouthshire County Council has won the Contingency Planning Footprint nine times over the last 10 years – four of which were at gold level. As part of receiving the gold award, the council has to hold a live planning exercise once every three years. This year's live exercise was named Operation Jurassic Spark, after an electrical fire at a tourist site. The RSPCA attended the exercise to work with the council on ensuring the welfare of any animals that might have to come into the rest centre as part of the evacuation and give advice to owners.

# RSPCA capabilities

The RSPCA can play a vital role in civil emergencies, with skills and resources that can help in rescuing both animals and humans in such situations.

## Flooding

Flooding has become a common issue in contingency planning as it is an increasingly common reality. Floodwater can pose a risk to both humans and animals, for example it could be contaminated or be concealing hazards below the waterline, potentially leading to disease or injury.

The RSPCA's Type C Swift Water Rescue Teams are equipped to deal with flood-stricken animals across England and Wales. We have a fleet of 4x4 vehicles, inflatable emergency rescue boats and hard-hulled rig flex boards, enabling the RSPCA to be deployed wherever they are needed in an emergency.

We respond to calls from the public about animals affected by flooding, so our Swift Water Rescue Teams are likely to be active, or on standby, during periods of prolonged heavy rain and flooding. The technicians can also deal with the more routine water rescues that the public call us about, involving animals in distress in rivers, lakes and canals.

## Rope rescue teams

The RSPCA can also offer the services of our rope rescue teams during emergencies. All members of the RSPCA Inspectorate receive basic rope awareness training and we have specialists who have undertaken advanced training in abseiling and leadership and are fully trained on the latest equipment. Whether it's helping save animals who have fallen off cliff edges or are stuck on the sides of hills and mountains, the rope rescue teams are equipped to help. In August 2017, for example, a six-strong team of RSPCA officers completed a dramatic rope rescue of a goat, trapped on a ledge towering above Llandudno's Great Orme.

## Evacuations

Where possible, the RSPCA will provide help during an evacuation, using specialist equipment to transport a range of companion animals and a limited range of livestock. During planning, LRFs and local authorities should consider ensuring spaces for evacuees with pets and, for those who do not have pets and do not want to be near animals, enabling evacuees to continue to look after their animals at all times.

Each RSPCA inspector's van contains at least two kennelling options for dogs and a range of equipment for the care of animals, enabling evacuees to leave their pet with the RSPCA if they need to access other facilities at the rest centre. While the local authority should strive to plan for such situations, it might be possible for the RSPCA to look after an animal if an evacuee has to leave the centre and is unable to take their animal. In this instance the RSPCA could take the animal to a friend or family member until they can be collected.





## THE RSPCA – A RESOURCE FOR CONTINGENCY PLANNERS

The RSPCA is the largest, oldest and best-known animal welfare organisation in the world and we have a wealth of knowledge and experience for you to tap into.

The RSPCA has a dedicated line for reporting cruelty and welfare concerns that operates 24-hours a day, 365 days a year: **0300 1234 999** (for members of the public)

Our website offers non-emergency advice and welfare information:

**[www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets](http://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets)**

For more information please contact:

England: **[politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk](mailto:politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk)**

Wales: **[externalaffairscymru@rspca.org.uk](mailto:externalaffairscymru@rspca.org.uk)**



## Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

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