



RSPCA Rolling Briefing

Rural Affairs, North Wales & Trefnydd

Questions

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

Date of Questions:	Tabled By:
17 November 2021	3.30pm on 10 November 2021

Recent Animal Welfare Updates

The Animal Welfare Plan for Wales must deliver. On November 4, the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales was published, outlining the Welsh Government's priorities for the next five years. RSPCA Cymru particularly welcomes the Welsh Government's plans to potentially licence animal exhibits and animal establishments, which could cover mobile animal exhibits, greyhound racing and establishments such as sanctuaries. We're also glad to see commitments to soon publish updated statutory guidance relevant to Wales' dog breeding regulations, and to potentially revise the law altogether, which would give the Welsh Government the opportunity to revisit many of the 55 recommendations made by the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group (WAHWFG) last year. While there's plenty to celebrate, RSPCA Cymru is concerned that there's no mention of the banning of snares as previously featured in the Programme for Government, nor glue traps following last month's welcome announcement - and it is hoped the Welsh Government will go even further for animals in the five years ahead.

Wales' local authorities need more support. Late last month, the Welsh Government published its guidance for local authorities to assist with the enforcement of the Licencing of Activities Involving Animals (Wales) Regulations (LAIAR) - Wales' new pet selling licensing scheme - which came into force on September 10. While the guidance is welcome, there has been little indication as to how local authorities will be supported financially, as their portfolio of animal welfare-related responsibilities will likely continue to increase following the publication of the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales, and with legislation like the UK Kept Animals Bill on the horizon. While RSPCA Cymru also welcomes the Wales' ongoing training programme to upskill local authority officers and support consistent enforcement, we continue to call for a wholesale review concerning the ability of Councils to enforce legislation impacting upon the welfare of animals, to ensure that these regulations, and others that may come into force in the future, are enforced effectively.

More action on fireworks is still needed. During a business statement in the Senedd on November 2, the Minister stated that "more progress" is needed when it comes to mitigating the risks fireworks pose to animals. This comes at a time when RSPCA polling suggested 2021 would see record numbers of DIY at-home fireworks displays. While issues related to noise pollution now fall under the remit of the new Climate Change Ministry, there is a clear need to consider the impact of fireworks on animal welfare, as well as our environment, along with how non-devolved legislation impacts the Welsh Government's ability to take action on fireworks. We continue to encourage the Welsh Government to use all the levers at their disposal to help alleviate the suffering fireworks can cause and to urge the the UK Government to introduce tougher restrictions on the use and sale of fireworks with New Year's Eve and Chinese New Year still to come; and work across Welsh Government Ministries will be key in achieving that.

They're sentient animals... get them out of there! It has been confirmed that the new season of *I'm a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here!*, which is taking place in Wales for a second year running, will be aired from November 21. RSPCA Cymru has long voiced concern with regard to the welfare of the animals featured in the programme, as they are often subject to stress, fear and even death in the name of entertainment. Tens of thousands of concerned RSPCA supporters complained to Ofcom about the programme last year and we continue to urge the production company involved to rethink the way they use animals. Last year, the makers of the programme were also accused of allowing non-native species of animals to escape into the environment in Wales during the programme's trials, with this leading to a subsequent police investigation. We urge the Welsh Government to closely monitor the programme's activities and to facilitate discussions with the makers of the programme to help protect the welfare of the animals involved, as well as the local ecosystems which could be undermined if invasive species were to escape.

Animal Welfare Plan for Wales

The Welsh Government's Animal Welfare Plan for Wales (AWPW) was published last week, outlining the areas of priority for the next five years in relation to achieving 'a good quality of life for all animals in Wales'. Within the plan, some of the Welsh Government's commitments featured within the Programme for Government were reconfirmed, along with some additional areas of Wales-based policy and commitments to joint-working with the UK Government¹.

Within the [Programme for Government](#)² which was published earlier this year, the Welsh Government committed to developing a national model for animal welfare, improving qualifications for animal welfare inspectors, requiring CCTV in all slaughterhouses and restricting the use of cages for farm animals - all of which have been included in the AWPW. As part of the Welsh Government's ongoing areas of policy work featured in the plan, an expected commitment to soon publish updated statutory guidance relevant to Wales' dog breeding regulations was included - but also plans to potentially revise the law altogether - much to the delight of RSPCA Cymru, following concerns that many of the 55 recommendations made by the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group (WAHWFG) last year as part of their review into the law have not yet been taken into consideration, despite the obvious welfare benefits they would help secure for dogs in Wales.

We are also glad to see the Licencing of Animal Exhibits & Animal Establishments included, linked to the development of a national model of regulation for animal welfare. This areas of focus could potentially pave the way for the regulation of mobile animal exhibits, such as those featuring reindeer that are popular around this time of year, as well as greyhound racing and animal welfare establishments such as rescue centres and, pertinently, sanctuaries. RSPCA Cymru has long called for the regulation of these activities and establishments and are glad to see Welsh Government showing ambition in this respect. The microchipping of cats and dogs is also included as an area of ongoing work, along with the Local Authority Enforcement Project which will run until 2023 and reviewing current Codes of Practice

The UK's Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill is at the forefront of the outlined areas of joined-up working with the UK Government. The Bill could ultimately see primates as pets, the live exports of animals for fattening and slaughter and the import of pets with mutilations such as ear-cropping banned in Wales should the Senedd pass a Legislative Consent Memorandum, and, in some instances, depending on the supplementary regulations passed by Welsh Ministers. The Bill will also reduce the number of puppies, kittens and ferrets that can be brought into the country. If applied to Wales, the Kept Animals Bill would also equip local authorities with better tools for the enforcement of licencing powers relevant to zoos and increase penalties for zoos who do not comply with the required standards. The welfare of animals during transport has been cited as another area of collaboration between the Welsh and UK Governments, including reducing maximum journey times and improving temperature conditions, ventilation, headroom height and space allowances.

While the plan contains a number of positive proposals which would go a long way to improving the lives of animals in Wales, including pets and livestock, RSPCA Cymru is concerned that the plan only references 'four' of the 'six' commitments made during the previously-published Programme for Government. Most worryingly, there is no mention of the Welsh Government's previous commitment to ban the use of snares and/or glue traps in Wales within the AWPW. RSPCA Cymru is now seeking assurances that these issues are still on the Welsh Government's agenda and will be included within the Agriculture (Wales) Bill as expected. Both snares and glue traps cause immeasurable suffering to animals, and because of their indiscriminate nature can also harm or even kill pets, wild birds and other endangered animals such as dormouse. We believe that banning these devices is a must if we are to secure a good quality of life for all animals in Wales and would appreciate clarity on this matter.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Can the Minister confirm if the Welsh Government still intends to ban snares and glue traps in Wales, following the absence of these commitments in the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales?**
- 2. Following the publication of the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales, can the Minister provide an update with regards to the timeframe for the publication of the Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group's implementation plan for 2021-2026?**
- 3. What evidence would the Welsh Government need to add additional commitments to their Animal Welfare Plan, and will this be a possibility as part of annual reviews into the AWPW?**

¹ <https://gov.wales/animal-welfare-plan-wales-2021-26>

² <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-06/programme-for-government-2021-to-2026.pdf>

Local authority funding

Following the recent publication of the Welsh Government's Animal Welfare Plan for Wales (AWPW), it is expected that Wales' 22 local authorities will become responsible for the enforcement of additional animal welfare legislation and regulations over the next five years. Wales' local authorities already play a key role in ensuring the welfare of the animals within their localities, through licencing and inspecting businesses such as pet shops, riding schools, pet boarders, farms and dog breeders. Enforcing animal welfare legislation set by the Welsh Government is set to become an increasingly demanding task for local authorities, following the recent introduction of the Licencing of Activities Involving Animals (Wales) Regulations (LAIAR) 2021 and with further powers anticipated for local authorities as part of extending LAIAR, as featured in the AWPW, and as part of the UK Government's Kept Animals Bill,

In a move that was much welcomed by RSPCA Cymru, the Welsh Government recently recruited an additional seven and a half regional inspectors to liaise with local authorities on the enforcement of LAIAR. However, with local authorities set to get additional duties which could include the licencing of mobile animal exhibits, animal welfare establishments and primate ownership, along with enforcement of CCTV in abattoirs, the microchipping of cats and more, RSPCA Cymru believes there is a need for a wholesale review concerning the ability of local authorities to enforce legislation that impacts upon the welfare of animals. While local authorities will inevitably play an important role in ensuring the success of many of the regulations set out in the AWPW as well as existing legislation, RSPCA Cymru is concerned that without additional funding and resources, enforcement may be an issue - particularly with many councils already working under significant financial constraints. Sadly, a 'postcode lottery' of animal welfare services across Wales from the public sector is increasingly evident, as well as a lack of financial resources to enforce all relevant animal welfare legislation. Because of this, we urge the Welsh Government to review the adequacy of the resources and funding allocated to local authorities to ensure the welfare of the animals within their areas as a matter of priority, to ensure that they are sufficient enough to allow them to effectively enforce existing and future animal welfare legislation.

Ensuring that local authorities are equipped with the adequate funding and resources will be crucial to the success of current and incoming animal welfare legislation, in addition to the relevant training and guidance being made readily available by the Welsh Government. Within the AWPW, the Welsh Government references the three-year training programme it has funded, to enhance its support for the training of enforcement officers in relation to legislation on dog breeding establishments. RSPCA Cymru welcomes plans to expand this scheme to support wider licencing activities involving animals and the associated professional development of enforcement officers. However, on October 28, the Welsh Government published its guidance for local authorities to assist them in enforcing the LAIAR, almost seven weeks after the regulations had come into effect. While the guidance is much-welcome, we urge the Welsh Government to ensure that all guidance relevant to new regulations is published before laws come into force, to equip local authorities with the advice needed for enforcement, while juggling a demanding and competing list of priorities.

As local authorities' workload relating to enforcing animal welfare legislation continues to increase, granting formal powers to the RSPCA inspectors under the Animal Welfare Act, which enforces around 85 percent of investigations for animal cruelty under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, could help relieve the pressure on statutory bodies. [An independent review of the prosecution activity of the RSPCA in 2014](#) recommended for the charity's officers to be appointed as Inspectors under the Animal Welfare Act³. This would bring the RSPCA in line with our sister organisations across the British Isles. In 2019, RSPCA Cymru issued a report to the Welsh Government concerning what powers it might be appropriate to formally give the charity's officers - and we hope a response to this review will soon be forthcoming, prioritising how this could benefit Wales' local authorities from a financial and workload perspective, while helping to ensure that at risk animals are able to be rescued more quickly.

Questions to consider:

- 1. What consideration has been given to the financial constraints Wales' 22 local authorities are facing, while being required to enforce a growing list of animal welfare regulations?**
- 2. Further to the ongoing training programme to upskill local authority enforcement officers, will this programme consider the need to allocate more funding to Councils for their animal welfare delivery?**
- 3. With local authorities set to become responsible for additional animal welfare regulation in the next five years, what further consideration has the Welsh Government given to granting formal powers to the RSPCA inspectors under the Animal Welfare Act to help alleviate pressure on Wales' public sector?**

³ The independent review of the prosecution activity of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, September 2014

Fireworks

Following a busy start to the fireworks season, which has seen an unprecedented amount of private and home displays, RSPCA Cymru is continuing its calls for stricter regulation around fireworks. RSPCA polling found 44 percent of people in Wales intended to attend an unofficial fireworks display this year; but there is concern the unplanned or spontaneous events could put animals at risk - with unofficial displays in close proximity to pet-owning homes, and less likely to have safety measures in place or to have notified the local community. Over the last five years, the RSPCA has received 1,621 calls about fireworks across England and Wales - with stress, anxiety and fear a reality for many animals. During a business statement in the Senedd on November 2, the Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales & Trefnydd acknowledged the negative effects fireworks have on animals and cited this as an area where “we need to make some progress”⁴. While the responsibility for noise-related issues such as fireworks falls under the remit of the Climate Change Ministry, RSPCA Cymru urges the Welsh Government to consider a cross-ministry approach towards fireworks, due to the risks they pose to both animal and human health, as well as our environment.

As it stands, fireworks is a largely non-devolved issue with the existing legislation - the Fireworks Act 2003 and the Fireworks Regulations 2004 - introduced over 15 years ago, however there are numerous steps that the Welsh Government can take to further mitigate the potential impacts of fireworks on Wales’ pets, wildlife and livestock.

As part of its focus on animal welfare, the Welsh Government could require all public firework displays within the local authority boundaries to be advertised in advance of the event, allowing residents to take precautions for their animals - and could also actively promote a public awareness campaign about the impact of fireworks on animal welfare – including the precautions that can be taken to ensure preparedness and mitigate risks. The Welsh Government could also play a role in encouraging local suppliers to stock ‘quieter’ fireworks for public display.

The RSPCA believes that the current law is ineffective as it does not prevent or reduce the risk of fireworks causing distress or anxiety to people or death, injury or distress to animals. Positively, however - while largely non-devolved - the Welsh Government has previously shown a willingness to act on the issue of fireworks, and an eagerness to encourage the UK Government to act. The Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales & Trefnydd previously held conversations with the UK and Scottish Governments to determine what more can be done to tackle issues related to fireworks on a UK level and also played an important role in calling for a reduced maximum decibel limit on fireworks to mitigate risks to animal health. Because of this, we feel the Minister would be particularly well-placed to advise on how Wales can continue to push for improvements in this area and urge the Rural Affairs Ministry to play a proactive role in discussions with the Climate Change Minister to mitigate the risks fireworks currently pose to animals across Wales.

Following the launch of our Bang Out of Order campaign for 2021, the RSPCA received strong cross-party support both within the Senedd and on social media, calling for stricter regulations on fireworks. The campaign was mentioned twice during Plenary in the week running up to Bonfire Night and was shared by at least 15 Members of the Senedd on social media. RSPCA Cymru hopes decision-makers in Wales will continue to be a strong advocate for change - whether the Welsh Government continues to pursue a joined-up approach with the UK Government - as is their current preference - or further explores the transfer of the regulatory responsibility on fireworks from Westminster to Cardiff.

Questions to consider:

- 1. With fireworks posing a significant risk to animal welfare as well as our environment, can the Minister confirm if her Ministry is working with the Climate Change Minister with a view to regulating fireworks use further in Wales?**
- 2. What action has Welsh Government taken to reduce the impact of fireworks on the welfare of animals, and what assessment has been made of any current devolved levers at the Welsh Government’s disposal?**
- 3. Following the Scottish Government’s decision to introduce tighter regulations on fireworks, what evidence would the Welsh Government need to consider pursuing a similar approach in Wales to limit the impact of fireworks on animals?**

⁴ <https://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/12491>

I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!

Earlier this year, it was confirmed that ITV's *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* will return to Wales and will take place in Conwy's Gwyrch Castle for a second year. With the programme set to recommence on November 21, RSPCA has serious concerns about the welfare of the animals set to be featured in the show. Since the show was first aired in 2002, countless animals have been dropped, thrown, handled roughly, chased, scared by contestants, and prevented from escaping stressful situations. Animals have also been eaten and killed, for no purpose other than entertainment. The show's messaging and the potential to prompt people to try and copy the 'bushtucker trials' at home for entertainment is also worrying, and we feel that deliberately portraying certain species as nasty or frightening or as objects that can be used purely for entertainment rather than as sentient, living creatures, sends out the wrong message.

Throughout the years, the RSPCA has raised concerns with the show's production company about how animals were being treated on the Australia-based programme, but we did not receive a response - until last year. We were very pleased when the show's production company reached out to us in the planning stages of last year's series, set here in Wales. During our conversations with them, we encouraged the show to change the way it uses animals and suggested introducing welfare-friendly alternatives to animal use in their trials. However, we were disappointed to learn that they would continue to use animals in this way during the last series and have received no indication that this has been rectified in time for this year's series.

A number of the animals used in the challenges, such as cockroaches and crickets, are invertebrates and are therefore not covered by the Animal Welfare Act 2006 or the Performing Animals Act 1925, which apply in Wales, meaning they have little to no legal protection. Last year, we ran a campaign which encouraged concerned animal lovers from around the UK to complain to Ofcom, the UK's communications regulator, about the use of live animals during the show's trials, which led to more than 10,800 people taking action. Despite this, the show has shown no signs of reconsidering its use of live animals to date.

Worryingly, last year's show also faced accusations of allowing non-native species of animal to escape into the environment in Wales⁵, which led to the police issuing them with advice on the potential release of non-native species, which is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The programme is also said to have used Turkish crayfish, an invasive species that can damage local ecosystems, without having the appropriate licence⁶. When approached, the Welsh Government said it was "unable to find any evidence that a licence application was made in this instance", with Defra confirming the same.

With the show set to start again on November 21, we urge the Welsh Government to help ensure that last year's mistakes are not repeated and to facilitate conversations with the show's production company to make it clear that cruelty to animals for the sake of entertainment is not welcome here in Wales and to encourage them to seek alternative, more humane methods.

Questions to consider:

- 1. With *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* returning to Wales for a second year, can the Minister confirm whether any conversations have taken place with the show's producers with regards to the welfare of the animals used during the programme, and the risks of invasive or non-native species escaping into local ecosystems in Wales?**
- 2. Does the Welsh Government have any concerns about the portrayal of animals in *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*, and what steps is the Welsh Government taking to proactively promote animal sentience and a positive relationship between humans and fellow living sentient creatures?**
- 3. Following the Welsh Government's recent publication of its *Animal Welfare Plan for Wales*, can the Minister make a statement on the use of live animals during *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*, which is being filmed in Wales for a second year running?**

⁵ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/im-a-celebrity-invasive-species-b1817984.html>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2021/mar/16/im-a-celebrity-brought-invasive-crayfish-to-wales-without-a-licence>

RSPCA Cymru incidents, August - October 2021

From August to October 2021, the RSPCA responded to 5,263 incidents across Wales - a 10.2 percent increase on the same time period last year; as Covid-19 restrictions significantly ease and people spend 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	August - October 2021	August - October 2020
Blaenau Gwent	102	105
Bridgend	170	164
Caerphilly	246	202
Cardiff	593	482
Carmarthenshire	354	301
Ceredigion	128	137
Conwy	284	298
Denbighshire	237	190
Flintshire	197	206
Gwynedd	239	197
Isle of Anglesey	152	152
Merthyr Tydfil	94	70
Monmouthshire	138	105
Neath Port Talbot	298	208
Newport	287	278
Pembrokeshire	212	247
Powys	192	189
Rhondda Cynon Taff	301	259
Swansea	463	475
The Vale of Glamorgan	208	147
Torfaen	144	134
Wrexham	224	226
TOTAL	5,263	4,772

More information on the work of the RSPCA, and bespoke briefings on all of our campaigns can be found on the [PoliticalAnimal website](https://www.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.