



RSPCA Rolling Briefing

Questions to the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs

Date of questions:	Tabled by:
17th of April 2024	3.30pm on 10th of April 2024

A new era for animal welfare in Wales? On March 20, Vaughan Gething MS was confirmed as Wales' new First Minister. Following his election, the First Minister formed a new cabinet, appointing Huw Irranca-Davies MS as Wales' new Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs - marking the first change in Ministerial responsibility for animal welfare matters in six years. With the Welsh Government's consultation on the licensing of animal establishments, activities and exhibits having recently closed, these changes come at a critical juncture for animal welfare in Wales. With the RSPCA's 200th anniversary taking place this year - making us the world's oldest animal welfare charity - 2024 marks an incredibly important year for us too. Both of the animal welfare commitments made in the new First Minister's leadership manifesto originated from RSPCA Cymru's public affairs work - including a commitment to grant additional enforcement powers to our inspectors. Positively, providing our officers with statutory powers has recently received strong support among Members of the Senedd, with a short debate on the topic having been tabled by Samuel Kurtz MS in November. We now look forward to working with the new Welsh Government and Senedd backbenchers to progress this commitment so that our inspectors are able to reach animals in need quicker while consequently relieving some of the pressure on our struggling public services.

Mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses regulations laid. Following years of campaigning for such action by RSPCA Cymru, regulations that could see the compulsory introduction of CCTV in all of Wales' abattoirs and slaughterhouses were laid on March 12. If approved, the new regulations will require all establishments within these settings to have CCTV in areas where live animals are unloaded, kept, handled and stunned. While the majority of Wales' larger slaughterhouses have such provisions in place already, mandatory measures will ensure that all have the necessary amenities in place to protect animal welfare while also providing the public with reassurances that good practice is being implemented at all times. The compulsory introduction of CCTV in such premises would also mark the completion of another of the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales (AWPW)' commitments, with the plan currently in its third year. A focus on the restriction of the use of cages for farmed animals - another AWPW commitment - is now anticipated, with the Scottish Government having recently launched a consultation on banning the use of cages for laying hens. With the Welsh Government having pledged to work with other devolved governments to examine the evidence around the use of cages in farming, it is hoped that a similar consultation relevant to Wales will soon be forthcoming.

Celebrating National Pet Month (April 1 - May 1). This month is National Pet Month providing us with the perfect opportunity to reflect on the joy companion animals bring into our lives, while also serving as a reminder of the importance of responsible pet ownership and purchasing. More than half of Wales' households have a pet/s, with dogs being the most common companion animal. While many dogs are chosen for their 'cute' features, some brachycephalic (flat-faced) breeds such as pugs and various types of bulldogs suffer from a number of associated health problems and breathing difficulties - hence the launch of a new public awareness campaign by the RSPCA to highlight this increasingly common issue. Positively, the Welsh Government has committed to reviewing Wales' dog breeding regulations as part of its current work around responsible dog ownership. RSPCA Cymru will be calling for a focus on tackling the breeding of dogs with extreme conformations, including those within unregulated Canine Fertility Clinics, as part of this to help further protect animal health and welfare.

Animal welfare under the new Welsh Government

Following the appointment of Vaughan Gething MS as Wales' new First Minister and Huw Irranca-Davies MS as Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, RSPCA Cymru is keen to ascertain how animal welfare will be prioritised in the coming years. The formation of a new Welsh Government comes at a particularly crucial time for this portfolio following recent progress made in terms of the delivery of the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales (AWPW). The Welsh Government's consultation of the licensing of animal establishments, activities and exhibits closed on March 1 - the outcome of which could see us advance towards stronger legal protections for thousands of animals in Wales, including racing greyhounds. The recent completion of this consultation relates to the Welsh Government's commitment to 'develop a national model for regulation of animal welfare, introducing registration for animal welfare establishments, commercial breeders for pets or for shooting, and animal exhibits'¹. In our response to this highly-important consultation, we voiced our strong support for the introduction of the regulation for animal welfare establishments such as sanctuaries, rescues and rehoming centres, as well as animal exhibits, along with calls for an end to greyhound racing in Wales. With the Welsh Government currently considering the responses to this comprehensive consultation, it is hoped that it will soon pave the way for further progression for animals under the new Cabinet Secretary's leadership.

The appointment of a new Cabinet Secretary with responsibility for animal welfare matters also coincides with the potentially imminent delivery of another AWPW commitment. On March 12, the Welsh Government laid [the Mandatory Use of Closed Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses \(Wales\) Regulations 2024](#). Members of the Senedd will now be given an opportunity to support these regulations later this month, before they come into force on May 1, if approved. With the Senedd's next election due to take place in May 2026, there are now just two years left for the AWPW to be completed in full, should the new Cabinet Secretary commit to its delivery among competing priorities.

In Vaughan Gething MS' leadership manifesto, the now-First Minister pledged to 'make Wales the leader on animal welfare standards in the UK' by granting additional enforcement powers to RSPCA officers. We currently have 31 inspectors and animal rescue officers (AROs) working on the ground in Wales to save animals from all forms of cruelty and neglect, while offering practical support and advice to animal owners and keepers in need of assistance. Our inspectors and AROs responded to approximately 5,000 cases specifically involving animal cruelty and neglect in Wales in 2023, with more than a million calls from Wales and England made to our cruelty line every year. While our staff work 356 days a year to rescue at risk animals, they currently have no specific legal powers which means that they often need to rely on the police and/or local authorities to help them reach animals in need. Last November, Samuel Kurtz MS tabled a short debate in the Senedd on providing the RSPCA with enforcement powers, during which the new Cabinet Secretary also voiced his support for the proposals². As this year marks the RSPCA's 200th anniversary - with a Senedd reception for MSs and other stakeholders due to take place on June 12 - we hope that 2024 will see us progress the commitment made by the First Minister so that we are able to further utilise our expertise to help even more vulnerable animals in the years to come.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Will the Cabinet Secretary outline what the Welsh Government's main priorities relevant to animal welfare will be under his leadership?**
- 2. Is the Cabinet Secretary committed to the full delivery of the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales?**
- 3. Can the Cabinet Secretary provide details on the Welsh Government's current position on providing RSPCA officers with additional enforcement powers?**

¹ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-11/animal-welfare-plan-wales-2021-26.pdf>

² <https://business.senedd.wales/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=700&MId=13561>

Improving farm animal welfare in Wales

On April 23, Members of the Senedd will be given an opportunity to vote in favour of new regulations which could require CCTV in all of Wales' abattoirs and slaughterhouses. RSPCA Cymru has long called for such action from the Welsh Government to protect both animal welfare and the staff within these establishments from untrue allegations of abuse. If approved, [the Mandatory Use of Closed Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses \(Wales\) Regulations 2024](#) will require CCTV in areas where live animals are unloaded, kept, handled and stunned along with requirements for recorded images to be retained by the slaughterhouse operator for a 90-day minimum period and made available to authorised persons. At present, there are approximately 22 slaughterhouses operating in Wales, five of which currently have no CCTV at all. Of the 17 that currently have CCTV, ten already have setups that would comply with the proposed regulations³. However, those that are currently without CCTV have yet to take up previous incentives, demonstrating the need for mandatory measures. RSPCA Cymru will be sending a full briefing on the topic ahead of the vote on the regulations, encouraging all MSs to support their long-awaited introduction.

The welfare of farmed animals has been high on the political agenda in Wales as of late, with the Senedd having given its consent for a ban on the live exportation of animals for fattening and slaughter to be applied to Wales on March 12. The Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Bill is expected to reach the report stage in the House of Lords soon - following the completion of the committee stage on March 14 - which means that it now needs to pass just two more stages before it becomes legislation⁴. As with mandatory CCTV, RSPCA has long called for such action to provide an extra layer of protection for farmed animals and we look forward to hopefully seeing both of these new measures rolled out in Wales in the near future.

Should mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses start being introduced as of May 1, there will be just one Animal Welfare Plan for Wales commitment which still needs progressing. In the plan, the Welsh Government outlines its intention to restrict the use of cages for farmed animals, with it stated that evidence will be gathered around the use of enriched cages for laying hens, farrowing crates for pigs and breeding cages for game birds in conjunction with the UK and Scottish Governments. On April 2, the Scottish Government launched a consultation on laying hens which could see them become the first UK nation to ban cages for these birds⁵. While Wales is thought to have the highest number of free-range egg producers in the UK - with previous estimates suggesting that 89 per cent of our production base could be considered as such⁶ - a ban on the use of cages would further protect chicken welfare. According to a 2020 survey, 88 percent of the British public consider using cages in farming cruel while 77 per cent of those surveyed would support a complete ban on the use of cages in farming⁷. Restricting the use of cages for farmed animals would further support the Welsh Government's ambition to ensure that all animals in Wales have a 'good quality life' and we would welcome any opportunity to work with the new Welsh Government and Senedd backbenchers on the delivery of this commitment.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Will the Cabinet Secretary provide detail on how the Mandatory Use of Closed Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses (Wales) Regulations 2024 will enhance Wales' animal welfare standards if approved by the Senedd?**
- 2. Can the Cabinet Secretary provide an update on the Welsh Government's commitment to restrict the use of cages for farmed animals?**
- 3. Does the Welsh Government intend to consult on a ban on the use of laying cages for hens following similar action by the Scottish Government?**

³ <https://www.gov.wales/mandatory-closed-circuit-television-cctv-slaughterhouses-regulatory-impact-assessment-html>

⁴ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3533>

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/news/consultation-on-laying-hens/>

⁶ <https://businesswales.gov.wales/foodanddrink/food-sectors/poultry-and-eggs>

⁷ <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/news/2020/12/88-of-uk-public-think-cages-are-cruel>

Responsible pet ownership and purchasing

With the first round of questions to the new Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs coinciding with National Pet Month (April 1 - May 1), RSPCA Cymru is calling on Members of the Senedd to help us highlight the importance of responsible pet ownership and purchasing. Wales is often referred to as a nation of animal lovers, with 53 per cent of households having a pet according to the most recent National Survey for Wales featuring questions on pet ownership. Dogs can be found in more than a third of households (36 per cent) making them the most common companion animals, with the majority of newer owners (58 per cent) having either purchased their canines from either private sellers or licensed breeders⁸.

While dogs undoubtedly make fantastic companions, a number of common breeds are subjected to prolonged suffering as a result of poor breeding practices, with some breeders - and prospective purchasers - prioritising looks over health. According to recent reports, French Bulldogs are one of the most popular breeds in Wales⁹, despite them being among those most prone to breathing problems. Other brachycephalic (flat-faced) dogs such as pugs can also struggle with such issues which means that they can be more expensive to insure or may require ongoing veterinary treatment throughout their lives. Unfortunately, the RSPCA has seen a number of brachycephalic dogs being relinquished to our centres in recent years, sometimes as a result of owners being unable to financially commit to the ongoing care their dogs will need. However, a focus on phasing out the breeding of dogs with extreme conformations through tighter measures for licenced breeders and Canine Fertility Clinics, while ensuring that only healthy animals are used for breeding within the relevant settings, could help protect and future proof dog welfare.

On March 13, the Welsh Government published an update on its work around Responsible Dog Ownership which again reinforced its intention to review Wales' dog breeding regulations¹⁰. RSPCA Cymru is among the organisations who have long called for the relevant legislation to be reviewed, with the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014 turning a decade old this year. With further workshops planned around responsible dog ownership in the coming months and with the Welsh Government routinely meeting with the third sector to discuss animal welfare, it is hoped that a joined-up approach towards tackling the relevant issues will be continued under the new Cabinet Secretary's leadership.

In the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales, the Welsh Government states its intention to revise its existing Codes of Practice relevant to pet ownership and to consider the need for new Codes in areas not currently covered¹¹. With our inspectors routinely handing out these Codes to our service users to help them ensure that they are meeting the welfare needs of their pets, RSPCA Cymru would welcome a renewed focus on this area of work. With there being two relevant sector groups - the Animal Welfare Network for Wales (AWNW) and the Companion Animal Welfare Group Wales (CAWGW) - with an abundance of expertise to offer, an opportunity to work alongside the Welsh Government to ensure these Codes are fit for purpose would be much welcome.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Will the Cabinet Secretary make a statement on the importance of responsible pet ownership and purchasing with National Pet Month currently underway?**
- 2. How does the new Welsh Government plan to work with the third sector to improve animal welfare in Wales going forward?**
- 3. Can the Cabinet Secretary provide an update on the Welsh Government's plans to review its Code of Practices for pet owners to ensure they are up-to-date and fit for purpose?**

⁸ <https://www.gov.wales/national-survey-wales-headline-results-april-2021-march-2022-html#101015>

⁹ <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/23884173.popular-dog-breeds-names-wales-revealed/>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-update-responsible-dog-breeding-and-ownership>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-11/animal-welfare-plan-wales-2021-26.pdf>

Apologies - due to an issue with our internal system, we are unable to provide the usual figures we include within this briefing in time for the tabling deadline. However, this issue should be resolved soon so please contact Billie-Jade Thomas (billie-jade.thomas1@rspca.org.uk) if any statistics relevant to your constituency/region would be useful.