



RSPCA Rolling Briefing

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

Date of questions:	Tabled by:
24th of January 2024	3.30pm on 17th of January

A busy year in store for animal welfare. With the new year now well underway, RSPCA Cymru is currently preparing our 200th anniversary celebrations amid what is set to be another busy year for animal welfare in Wales. Towards the end of 2023, the Welsh Government launched two hugely important consultations that could protect and improve the welfare of countless animals in years to come. The consultation on the [licensing of animal welfare establishments, activities and exhibits](#) could pave the way for the regulation of a number of currently unregulated settings where oversight at a local authority level could ensure that the welfare of the animals within them is better protected. RSPCA Cymru has long called for the regulation of animal sanctuaries, rescue and rehoming centres and mobile exhibits, with these being among the key focuses of this consultation. The consultation is also calling for evidence on other activities such as dog walking, pet grooming and the keeping of primates as pets. The reference to a phased ban on greyhound racing in the consultation is also especially welcome, following a busy year of campaigning on this issue for the RSPCA and the Cut the Chase coalition in 2023. The [final consultation](#) on the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) was also launched in December, with this including a number of proposals relevant to animal welfare. RSPCA Cymru has long called for farmers who adhere to higher welfare standards to be rewarded for their efforts, with the final consultation on the SFS providing an appropriate pathway for such action from the Welsh Government.

LCM laid on live exports. As well as having the potential for improvements to animal welfare in Wales, 2024 is set to be an important year for animals on both sides of the border. A number of bills relevant to animal welfare are expected to make their way through the Houses of Parliament ahead of the upcoming General Election - at least three of which could be applied to Wales. The Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Bill received its second reading in Westminster on December 18 - much to our delight following more than 50 years of campaigning on this issue. Two days later, the Welsh Government laid a [Legislative Consent Memorandum](#), with the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd recommending that the Senedd supports the proposals. Towards the end of last year, Members of Parliament submitted proposals for Private Members Bills (PMB), with a much-welcome bill to tackle pet smuggling among those tabled. During a scrutiny session with the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee in December, the Minister confirmed that the Welsh Government will work with its UK counterparts to ensure that the pet smuggling bill will be applied to Wales along with the live exports ban and new plans to tackle livestock worrying.

RSPCA Cymru welcomes local authority review into dog breeding. RSPCA Cymru has written to Carmarthenshire County Council offering our support, following confirmation that the local authority will be conducting an enquiry into illegal dog breeding. RSPCA Cymru has long shared the concerns around the prevalence of illegal dog breeding throughout Wales, with our frontline officers often supporting extremely challenging investigations into such cases. Illegal dog breeding can have huge consequences for animal welfare while providing a lucrative means of income for those who participate in this unethical practice. According to the data we received from 21 of Wales' local authorities last summer, Carmarthenshire County Council conducted the highest number of investigations into illegal dog breeding in 2022 while also undertaking the highest number of relevant prosecutions. While the growing number of enquiries submitted to Wales' local authorities suggest that the public are becoming increasingly vigilant about illegal dog breeding, they also serve as evidence of an ongoing problem. As a result, we remain as keen as ever to work with governments of all levels to tackle the animal welfare issues associated with the breeding of puppies and hope that 2024 will provide a number of opportunities to do so.

Consulting on the future of animal welfare in Wales

Along with marking the RSPCA's 200th anniversary, 2024 is set to be another important year for animal welfare in Wales. Soon, the Welsh Government's commitment to require CCTV in all slaughterhouses will come into force, marking the completion of another [Programme for Government](#) commitment. Work to fulfil another one of the commitments featured in both the Programme for Government and [Animal Welfare Plan for Wales](#) is now also underway. A consultation on the licensing of animal welfare establishments, activities and exhibits was launched on December 8, paving the way for the development of a national model for regulation of animal welfare. While enabling the introduction of registration for animal welfare establishments and animal exhibits is among the aforementioned consultation's main priorities, reference is also made to a number of other activities. These include animal trainers and behaviourists, livery services and the keeping of primates as pets. The unexpected inclusion of the latter is very much welcome following years of campaigning on the keeping of monkeys as pets by RSPCA Cymru. Meanwhile, a relevant statutory instrument that will introduce stricter measures for those who want to keep primates in England was laid by the UK Parliament in December. With there being no current requirement for pet monkeys such as marmosets to be registered, it is unclear how many primates are currently within domestic settings in Wales. However, the licensing of primate ownership would enable local authorities to collect data on how many pet monkeys there are in Wales while ensuring that their specific needs are being met by owners - marking a significant step forward if this work is prioritised.

Unbeknownst to many members of the public who trust such establishments and service providers with their beloved companion animals, pet grooming, dog walking, pet sitting and day cares are all unregulated as it stands. While the Welsh Government will inevitably need to prioritise the regulation of certain establishments and exhibits to fulfil the aforementioned commitments, the inclusion of such a broad range of activities provides an important opportunity to collect currently absent data and evidence for future reference. As well as specifically naming 11 different animal activities, the consultation also includes a call for evidence to justify or negate a phased ban on greyhound racing in the future. Following a successful year of campaigning on this issue by both Members of the Senedd and animal welfare organisations alike, it is hoped that 2024 will see progress made in terms of ending greyhound racing in Wales once and for all.

The conclusion of this consultation will inevitably see local authorities and/or Animal Licensing Wales become responsible for the licensing of more establishments and activities involving animals, in addition to dog breeders and pet sellers. With the Welsh Government having published its draft budget for 2024-2025 towards the end of last year proposing a reduction in the budget of the rural affairs portfolio, assurances that funding has been ring fenced for the enforcement of new regulations relevant to animal welfare are much needed. Recent concerns around a potential reduction in the expected budget of the rural affairs portfolio¹ also coincide with the launch of the final consultation on the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) - the main source of future government support for farmers in Wales. This consultation could lead to improvements in the welfare of farm animals by requiring farmers to meet certain animal health targets, while also providing them with an option to be rewarded for other high-standards of animal welfare. Two compulsory Universal Actions relevant to animal health and welfare are proposed within the new consultation on the SFS. If these actions are implemented, farmers will be required to work with their vets to establish an ongoing proactive approach to animal health while completing competency training and carrying out lameness and body condition scoring to improve livestock welfare standards. Among the optional actions outlined in the consultation are support to use a higher animal standard - much to the delight of RSPCA Cymru following years of calling for such action. We now look forward to supporting these proposals in 2024 in the hope that they will be included in the SFS when it is launched in 2025.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Can the Minister confirm what progress she hopes to make in relation to the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales in 2024?**
- 2. Can the Minister confirm when the requirement for mandatory CCTV in all abattoirs will come into force?**
- 3. Can the Minister confirm if the relevant funding has been ring fenced to enable local authorities and Animal Licensing Wales to facilitate the future licensing of additional animal welfare establishments, activities and exhibits?**

¹ <https://www.fwi.co.uk/news/farm-policy/bps-protected-but-welsh-farmers-face-steep-budget-cuts-elsewhere>

Improving animal welfare on both sides of the border

While animal welfare is set to remain high on the political agenda in Wales in 2024, the coming months could also see the introduction and progression of key pieces of reserved legislation in the Houses of Parliament. Following the announcement that the UK Government intends to uphold its promise to introduce a ban on live exports, the Animal Welfare (Livestock Exportation) Bill is now making its way through the House of Commons. The bill passed its second reading in December, with the committee stage having taken place on January 15. If completed, this bill will end the exportation of livestock for fattening and slaughter once and for all - protecting countless animals from this cruel practice.

Every year, millions of farm animals are at risk of facing long-distance journeys so that they can be exported for fattening and slaughter. With these journeys having the potential to cause animals to become mentally exhausted, physically injured, dehydrated and stressed, the RSPCA has been calling for a ban on this cruel practice for more than 50 years. Over the years, thousands of animals have travelled miles across Europe, where they have been exposed to exhaustion, extreme temperatures, suffering and even death. These journeys can sometimes take up to 96 hours before the animals are either slaughtered or kept in conditions that are potentially illegal in the UK for fattening purposes. While the exportation of livestock from the UK has not happened since the UK Government first announced the prohibition of this practice in 2020, it could be legally recommenced at any time - putting animals at risk. Because of this, it is vital that the new Bill becomes legislation before next year's General Election and that it is applied to Wales via legislative consent. Positively, the Welsh Government laid an LCM relevant to the live exports ban just before the Christmas break with the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd recommending that the Senedd supports the proposals and gives its consent². With a debate on this LCM expected in the near future, RSPCA Cymru will be urging Members of the Senedd from all parties to vote in favour of allowing the ban on live exports to be applied to Wales.

A ban on live exports was previously featured in the withdrawn Kept Animals Bill (KAB) along with plans to tackle puppy smuggling and pet abduction. These measures were also featured in the UK Conservatives' 2019 manifesto and have now been given an opportunity for revival via the Private Members Bill (PMB) ballot that took place on November 16. Selaine Saxby MP came sixth in the ballot and has since confirmed plans to table a bill that will tackle the smuggling of dogs, cats and ferrets. The smuggling of puppies into the UK is particularly prevalent and sees dogs kept in conditions that would be illegal here and used to breed multiple litters. As well as giving the UK Government another opportunity to end this cruel trade, the proposed Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill could also address the smuggling of these animals into Wales too. On December 13, the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee held a general scrutiny session with the Minister. During this session, the Minister confirmed that her officials are working with Defra on the pet smuggling bill following its first reading on December 8. The Minister also noted that plans to tackle livestock worrying have also been brought forward via a presentation Bill, while confirming that the Welsh Government are keen to see these applied to Wales too³. However, there was no mention of whether the Welsh Government intends to work with the UK Government to tackle pet theft, despite a relevant PMB having been tabled on this topic too. With no date having been set for the upcoming General Election as it stands, the amount of time the new pieces of legislation on live exports, pet smuggling and livestock worrying have to make their way through the relevant processes remains unclear. Because of this, it is vital that these pieces of legislation are not subjected to any delays to ensure that they are able to be progressed and protect animal welfare as intended. RSPCA Cymru therefore urges the Welsh Government to work with its UK counterparts as closely as possible to ensure that these important pieces of legislation are finalised and applied to Wales before the public selects the next UK Government.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Can the Minister make a statement on the importance of a ban on live exports being applied to Wales via legislative consent?**
- 2. How will the Welsh Government work with the UK Government in 2024 to improve animal welfare in Wales?**
- 3. What assessment has the Welsh Government made of the prevalence of pet theft in Wales?**

² <https://senedd.wales/media/fyzatuwr/lcm-ld16229-e.pdf>

³ <https://record.senedd.wales/Committee/13575>

Local authority launches enquiry into illegal dog breeding

Towards the end of last year, Carmarthenshire County Council announced plans to undertake a review into illegal dog breeding in the county⁴ - making them the first local authority in Wales to take such action. Illegal dog remains a prevalent animal welfare issue in Wales, as demonstrated by recent research undertaken by RSPCA Cymru. Last summer, we collated figures that show that the number of prosecutions and enquiries into dog breeding in Wales rose again in 2022 for the second year running. Under the Freedom of Information Act, RSPCA Cymru requested information from all 22 local authorities in Wales in relation to how they are currently tackling puppy breeding in their respective council areas. Our finalised data shows that the number of enquiries with regards to dog breeding across local authorities in Wales increased by 25% - up from 372 in 2021 to 465 in 2022. Local authorities also took on additional prosecutions in 2022, with this marking an increase of 28%.

According to our research, Carmarthenshire County Council received the highest number of enquiries of all local authorities in Wales for the second year running - despite receiving less queries year on year. Cardiff and Caerphilly also make up the top three councils who received the most enquiries. As well as having received the highest number of enquiries, Carmarthenshire CC also undertook the highest number of investigations and prosecutions with more than three quarters (7/9) of such prosecutions by Wales' local authorities having been undertaken by Carmarthenshire.

Local authorities are responsible for the licensing of breeding establishments and ensuring that dog breeders uphold the conditions of their licences. According to Carmarthenshire County Council, 71 licensed dog breeders operate in the county and at least ten of them have more than 100 dogs. While this makes Carmarthenshire one of the most prevalent hotspots for dog breeding in Wales and England, the upcoming review will focus solely on illegal dog breeding. With RSPCA Cymru having a number of experienced officers who cover Carmarthenshire, we have written to the council to offer our assistance with this review. Our officers are accustomed to assisting local authorities with complex investigations involving illegal breeding and would therefore be well-placed to offer their expertise. A task and finish group will be set up to conduct the review, which could also see councillors invited to accompany council officers on a search of suspected illegal dog breeding premises to help them understand the subject better. The Welsh Government's Local Authority Enforcement Project has enabled the Welsh Government to offer enhanced support for the training of enforcement officers in relation to legislation on dog breeding establishments. Along with improving their qualifications and professional status, as set out in the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales, it is likely that this training has better-equipped officers in spotting the signs of illegal dog breeding and the differences between standards. In June, the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd confirmed that the project will be extended to 2026.

Towards the end of 2023, the Minister published [a statement](#) on the outcome of the Welsh Government's summit on Responsible Dog Ownership which was held in October. Within this statement it was confirmed that a focus on updating and future-proofing Wales' dog breeding laws will be among the outcomes of the summit, with a follow-up meeting between the relevant stakeholders expected in the near future. With us keen to see updates made to the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014 - and with this legislation turning 10 years old in 2024 - we look forward to working with governments of all levels to tackle the welfare issues associated with breeding puppies for profit.

Questions to consider:

- 1. How is the Welsh Government supporting local authorities to help them tackle illegal dog breeding in Wales and will the Welsh Government make more funding available for local authorities to enforce the new rules on abandoned and stray American Bully XLs?**
- 2. Would the Minister consider encouraging all of Wales' local authorities to follow in the footsteps of Carmarthenshire County Council by undertaking reviews into illegal dog breeding in their respective counties?**
- 3. Will the Minister make a statement on the Welsh Government's Local Authority Enforcement Project and how it has helped tackle illegal puppy breeding in Wales?**

⁴ <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/dog-breeding-carmarthenshire-council-puppies-28309601>

RSPCA Cymru incidents October - December 2023

From October to December 2023, the RSPCA responded to 2,170 incidents across Wales - a 10.19% decline on the previous year. However, this remains an exceptionally busy time for the RSPCA's officers, centres and branches, as well as the charity's emergency line.

Local authority	October - December 2022	October - December 2023
Blaenau Gwent	64	50
Bridgend	119	80
Caerphilly	103	146
Cardiff	228	203
Carmarthenshire	158	169
Ceredigion	57	44
Conwy	100	102
Denbighshire	108	88
Flintshire	122	94
Gwynedd	88	87
Isle of Anglesey	83	53
Merthyr Tydfil	58	52
Monmouthshire	58	66
Neath Port Talbot	128	108
Newport	111	75
Pembrokeshire	105	72
Powys	81	102
Rhondda Cynon Taff	175	157
Swansea	231	201
The Vale of Glamorgan	63	49
Torfaen	82	83
Wrexham	94	89
TOTAL	2,416	2,170

For more information on the contents of this briefing or any other matters relating to animal welfare in Wales, please contact:

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