



RSPCA Rolling Briefing

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

| Date of questions: | Tabled by: |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 28th of February 2024 | 3.30pm on 21st of February 2024 |

Will Wales' next First Minister deliver for animals? With the Welsh Labour leadership contest well underway, we will soon know whether Vaughan Gething MS or Jeremy Miles MS will be Wales' next First Minister. The upcoming leadership selection comes at a critical juncture for animal welfare in Wales, with the Welsh Government currently consulting on the licensing of more animal establishments, activities and exhibits. Both candidates' leadership manifestos feature strong animal welfare related commitments which could potentially see additional measures brought forward in the coming years. In his leadership manifesto, Jeremy Miles MS pledges to review dog licensing and to work with Labour party colleagues to strengthen reserved legislation such as the Hunting Act 2004 and Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. A commitment to bring in a progressive ban on greyhound racing is also featured, with Jeremy being among the 21 MSs who recently joined members of the Cut the Chase coalition to call for an end to this activity in Wales. Meanwhile, Vaughan Gething MS commits to providing the RSPCA with additional enforcement powers to help more animals in need, following a Senedd debate on such proposals last November, along with a Wales-wide ban on the giving of pets as prizes. With RSPCA Cymru being a key stakeholder in all of the relevant pledges made by both candidates in their leadership manifestos, we look forward to working with the next First Minister and their team to make Wales an even better place for animals.

Action needed in the absence of pet abduction bill. RSPCA Cymru is urging the Welsh Government to consider what action could be undertaken to prevent pet theft, with it seemingly unlikely that the UK Government's Pet Abduction Bill will be applied to Wales. While having a much-loved pet stolen can be heartbreaking for owners, the theft of a companion animal is currently treated in the same way by the law as the theft of an inanimate object such as a bike or mobile phone. With many animal lovers considering their pets as part of their families - and with some people only having their pets for companionship - we strongly believe that stolen animals should be recognised and treated as sentient beings. With Wales' police forces holding the data around such incidents, it is unclear how prevalent the issue is as it stands. Fortunately, there are a number of proactive steps owners can take to prevent their pet from being stolen, including ensuring that their pets are microchipped. RSPCA Cymru is among the organisations who would welcome the opportunity to work with the Welsh Government on reviewing Wales' current microchipping regulations as outlined in the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales, with such action having the potential to reunite more lost and stolen pets with their owners.

Plans to tackle livestock worrying tabled. Recently-announced measures to reduce dog attacks on livestock could soon see Wales' four police forces given greater powers to respond to such incidents. On February 2, the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Bill, introduced by Thérèse Coffey MP to 'clamp down' on such occurrences, was given its second reading in the House of Commons. With current legislation relevant to livestock worrying being more than 70 years old, action is needed to ensure a modernised approach towards the issue with the number of livestock having since doubled in England and Wales, according to the UK Government. While many owners exercise their dogs' responsibility, livestock worrying continues to be a prevalent issue in Wales as a result of more people visiting the countryside and irresponsible ownership. In a recent scrutiny session, the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd indicated her support for action to tackle the problem with it hoped that a relevant Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) could see its provisions applied to Wales. On February 15, the Welsh Government held its follow-up workshop on responsible dog ownership following last October's summit, where livestock worrying was among the many issues raised. With more workshops planned in the months to come, a joined-up approach on tackling the issues relevant to irresponsible dog ownership could soon pave the way for stronger action to protect both human and animal welfare.

Wales' next First Minister soon to be confirmed

On March 16, Wales' next First Minister will be announced with Vaughan Gething MS and Jeremy Miles MS in the running to lead Welsh Labour. Both candidates' leadership manifestos feature much welcome commitments relevant to animal welfare - indicating the ongoing importance of the issue to the next Welsh Government. The next First Minister will be selected ahead of the delivery of the final stages of the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales (AWPW), which outlines the Welsh Government's relevant plans up until 2026. The completion of another of the AWPW's commitments is expected soon, as a result of the implementation of mandatory CCTV in all abattoirs, although an update on the date for the roll out of this scheme would be much welcome.

Vaughan Gething MS's animal welfare commitments include two nods to RSPCA Cymru's public affairs work. As part of plans to make 'Wales the leader on animal welfare standards in the UK', his leadership manifesto pledges to grant additional enforcement powers to our officers who work tirelessly to rescue animals from cruelty and neglect. Last November, Samuel Kurtz MS tabled a Senedd debate on these proposals, with Labour backbenchers Huw Irranca-Davies MS and Carolyn Thomas MS also voicing their support. We first submitted proposals to the Welsh Government detailing how granting our inspectors with limited powers under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 could help us reach animals in need quicker in 2019 and are keen to see this work revisited following the delivery of the AWPW. Vaughan's manifesto also contains a pledge to follow in the footsteps of many local authorities by bringing forward an outright ban on the giving of pets as prizes. Earlier this year, it was confirmed that all of Wales' 22 local authorities have now either banned or are in the process of banning this outdated practice on their land, thanks to action taken by the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd last summer¹. The Minister wrote to the ten councils who had yet to bring forward bans in June, with this leading to a surge in new bans being brought forward.

Another of RSPCA Cymru's key priorities is featured within Jeremy Miles MS's manifesto due to the inclusion of a pledge to bring forward a progressive ban on greyhound racing. The Cut the Chase coalition, of which the RSPCA is a part of, welcomed 21 MSs from all four of Senedd's political parties to an event on February 6 to call for an end to greyhound racing in Wales. With the Welsh Government's consultation that features a question relevant to the future of the 'sport' in Wales open, our campaign to secure such action to protect the welfare of these vulnerable dogs is at a critical stage. Jeremy's manifesto also includes a commitment to review dog licensing to help fund greater enforcement capacity, with this being something the RSPCA is generally supportive of. The University of South Wales is currently exploring a range of tools to prevent dog bites and promote responsible dog ownership on our behalf and we look forward to sharing the findings of this research with all MSs - including our next First Minister - in due course. Strengthening reserved legislation such as the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and the Hunting Act 2004 is also featured, with the RSPCA having played a key role in the introduction of the latter.

The Welsh Government's aforementioned consultation on the licensing of more animal establishments, activities and exhibits will be closed by the time our next First Minister is announced, with RSPCA Cymru being among the organisations who are currently preparing to submit responses. The outcome of this consultation will be instrumental in terms of shaping the future of animal welfare in Wales by introducing stronger protections at a local authority level. However, if the pledges featured in both leadership candidates' manifestos - and the Welsh Government's current plans - are to be made possible, it is vital that consideration is given as to how these will be implemented and enforced and that local authorities are given the support needed to carry out their statutory duties during these challenging times. We therefore call on Wales' next First Minister and their teams to ensure such action is prioritised and would welcome any opportunity to continue working with the Welsh Government to ensure all animals in Wales are protected appropriately.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Can the Minister confirm if any conversations have been held around animal welfare with the two prospective candidates for Wales' next First Minister?**
- 2. Can the Minister confirm when mandatory CCTV in abattoirs will be rolled out in Wales?**
- 3. Can the Minister confirm how the full delivery of the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales will be implemented and enforced?**

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-67933440>

Plans needed to tackle pet theft in Wales

With the Welsh Government not expected to seek legislative consent for the UK Government's Pet Abduction Bill, RSPCA Cymru is calling for alternative action to be undertaken to tackle pet theft in Wales. The Pet Abduction Bill, which looks to create specific offences for the theft of both cat and dogs, is progressing quickly through the House of Commons and is expected to reach the report stage on February 23. The Bill will make the theft of these pets a specific offence which means that anyone found guilty of stealing them could face up to five years in prison, a fine or both².

The RSPCA has long called for companion animals to be considered more than 'loss of property' to their owners, as they currently are under the Theft Act 1968, considering the devastating emotional impact having pets stolen can have on animals and people alike. Pet theft was particularly prevalent throughout the pandemic, with the area covered by Dyfed-Powys Police named among the UK's top hotspots for dog abductions in 2021 following 82 reports of such incidents³. 2,780 dogs were stolen across Wales and England over the course of the year, making a 13 per cent increase on the previous year. The spike in incidents led to Dyfed Powys police becoming the first in Wales to introduce DNA profiling to trace stolen dogs, along with a relevant database, in 2023⁴. As part of this scheme, owners were urged to get their dogs tested and share the information with the police to increase the chance of them being reunited with their pet if they were stolen.

Plans to tackle pet theft were included in the now withdrawn Kept Animals Bill (KAB), which the Welsh Government had previously indicated its support for. A number of bills that are currently making their way through the Houses of Parliament to replace the provisions previously included under KAB could be applied to Wales via legislative consent over the coming months. The Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee considered the Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Bill on February 7, with a debate of the [Legislative Consent Memorandum](#) (LCM) laid by the Welsh Government towards the end of last year expected soon. If applied to Wales, this bill would prohibit the live export of animals for fattening and slaughter, with the RSPCA having called for such action for over 50 years.

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 Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill will be applied to Wales along with the live exports ban. This bill will restrict the importation and non-commercial movement of dogs, cats and ferrets, with it hoped that this will also include dogs with cropped ears and other mutilations⁵. The second reading of this bill is scheduled to take place on March 15, with the Welsh Government expected to lay another LCM soon after. However, mention of the Pet Abduction Bill was notably absent during December's aforementioned scrutiny session. A proactive approach and vigilance from owners can help keep pets safe from potential thieves, with this including ensuring gardens and fences are secure and that their dogs have good recall, as well as ensuring both cats and dogs are microchipped. Being microchipped significantly increases the likelihood of a lost or stolen pet being reunited with their owner, as noted in the [Animal Welfare Plan for Wales](#) (AWPW). Plans to consider the compulsory microchipping of cats and kittens are included in the AWPW, although RSPCA Cymru is among the organisations who share concerns that the current system is not fit for purpose due to the oversaturation of the private microchipping industry which causes problems in tracing the details held by some chips, such as those bought online. We would therefore welcome any opportunity to work with the Welsh Government on the development of more efficient regulations to make it easier to reunite lost and stolen pets with their owners.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Can the Minister elaborate on the Welsh Government's decision not to seek legislative consent for the UK Government's Pet Abduction Bill?**
- 2. What recent conversations has the Welsh Government held with Wales' four police forces with regard to the prevalence of pet theft in Wales?**
- 3. Is the Welsh Government still planning to review Wales' pet microchipping regulations to ensure they are fit for purpose?**

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-backs-new-pet-abduction-law-in-pet-theft-crackdown>

³ <https://www.heart.co.uk/lifestyle/pets/dog-thefts-stolen-hotspots-england-wales-map/>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-64446831>

⁵ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3546>

Lessening the devastating impact of livestock worrying

With spring on the horizon and lambing season well underway, confirmation that new plans to tackle livestock worrying could soon be applied to Wales is much welcome. On February 2, the UK Government confirmed its backing for new legislation that seeks to modernise the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 to ensure it is fit for purpose in tackling the issues relevant to livestock worrying⁶. Livestock worrying - when dogs chase, attack or cause distress to livestock, such as sheep - can have significant consequences for animal welfare as a result of irresponsible ownership. The Welsh Government issued a relevant press release just days before its latest workshop on responsible dog ownership with stakeholders such as RSPCA Cymru on February 15, to remind owners to keep their dogs under control near livestock noting the potential emotional, financial and animal welfare implications of not doing so⁷. The press release states that there are too many dog attacks on sheep - of which Wales has more than 10 million, with our national flock accounting for more than a third of Britain's total sheep numbers⁸, making livestock worrying particularly relevant to Wales. According to the Welsh Government, research has found most incidents involving dogs attacking sheep take place on land not accessible to the public, with owners urged to familiarise themselves with Natural Resources Wales' [Countryside Code](#).

Under the new Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Bill sponsored by Thérèse Coffey MP, police forces could be given new powers to respond to reports of livestock worrying more effectively by making it easier to collect evidence and if needed, seize and detain the dogs involved. Powers to enable investigating officers to take samples for livestock and dogs to help with such cases could also be included, with all provisions expected to be to include alpacas and llamas as well as widening locations so that enforcement can be taken to roads and paths. With the committee stage for this bill expected to take place in the House of Commons soon, a legislative consent motion that would enable its provisions to be applied to Wales is expected to be laid in the near future, with the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd having indicated her support for such action in December⁹. With Welsh Government officials currently working with Defra on three reserved bills relevant to animal welfare that could be applied to Wales via legislative consent, ongoing cooperation and a joined-up approach will hopefully soon benefit animals on both sides of the border.

Plans to tackle livestock worrying via modernised legislation complement the current focus on responsible dog ownership in Wales. The Welsh Government's latest workshop with stakeholders such as the police, local authorities and third actor organisations such as ourselves took place on February 15, with subsequent workshops planned for April, July and September. Following the Welsh Government-convened summit in October, a [written statement](#) was published outlining the relevant outcomes and next steps. These include potentially updating and future-proofing Wales' dog breeding regulations, introducing formal recording of dog attacks/livestock worrying and addressing how police forces prioritise and report dog-related incidents. With the aforementioned research by the University of South Wales that is being conducted on our behalf expected to be completed soon, this should enable us to continue making an evidence-based contribution towards tackling the issues relevant to irresponsible dog ownership in Wales.

Questions to consider:

- 1. How is the Welsh Government working with other stakeholders to address the issues relevant to livestock worrying in Wales?**
- 2. How is the Welsh Government working with Natural Resources Wales to promote its Countryside Code to dog owners, both domestic and visiting?**
- 3. How does the potential for joint-action with the UK Government on livestock worrying correspond with the Welsh Government's plans to protect the welfare of farmed animals?**

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-backs-bill-to-clamp-down-on-livestock-worrying>

⁷ <https://www.gov.wales/responsible-dog-ownership-vital-protect-livestock>

⁸ <https://businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect/livestock/sheep>

⁹ <https://record.senedd.wales/Committee/13575>

RSPCA Cymru incidents November 2023 - January 2024

From November 2023 to January 2024, the RSPCA responded to 2,075 incidents across Wales - a 5.16% 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 | November 2022 - January 2023 | November 2023 - January 2024 |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Blaenau Gwent | 61 | 51 |
| Bridgend | 83 | 76 |
| Caerphilly | 105 | 129 |
| Cardiff | 206 | 187 |
| Carmarthenshire | 156 | 152 |
| Ceredigion | 45 | 49 |
| Conwy | 90 | 93 |
| Denbighshire | 90 | 77 |
| Flintshire | 123 | 103 |
| Gwynedd | 83 | 81 |
| Isle of Anglesey | 54 | 60 |
| Merthyr Tydfil | 49 | 52 |
| Monmouthshire | 52 | 57 |
| Neath Port Talbot | 110 | 99 |
| Newport | 116 | 93 |
| Pembrokeshire | 101 | 78 |
| Powys | 90 | 99 |
| Rhondda Cynon Taff | 155 | 153 |
| Swansea | 206 | 191 |
| The Vale of Glamorgan | 54 | 39 |
| Torfaen | 79 | 74 |
| Wrexham | 96 | 82 |
| TOTAL | 2,204 | 2,075 |

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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