



RSPCA Rolling Briefing

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

| Date of questions: | Tabled by: |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
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Recent animal welfare updates

RSPCA Cymru welcomes focus on responsible dog ownership. With a new month underway, issues relevant to responsible dog ownership remain a key focus point for the Welsh Government, Members of the Senedd (MSs), third sector organisations and members of the public alike. On October 11, a Senedd debate around what action could be taken to promote responsible dog ownership in Wales was led by Peredur Owen Griffiths MS, with support from Delyth Jewell MS. This much-welcome debate saw discussions on the clear need for a focus on education and public awareness, ahead of the Welsh Government's summit on the matter the following week. RSPCA Cymru attended this important summit along with MSs, local authorities, animal welfare organisations, and other relevant stakeholders. With the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd expected to put a written statement before MSs as a result of the summit soon, we look forward to hearing details of the Welsh Government's subsequent plans and next steps. A clear plan of action is especially needed with the UK Government's forthcoming ban on XL Bullies expected to place further pressure on the already-struggling animal rescue sector in the coming months.

Marking the second anniversary of the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales (AWPW). It has now been two years since the publication of the [Animal Welfare Plan for Wales](#). This plan outlines the Welsh Government's relevant commitments up until 2026, and sets out what will be done to ensure a 'good quality of life' for all animals in Wales over the coming years. With the introduction of mandatory CCTV in all slaughterhouses expected to be rolled out soon - much to the delight of RSPCA Cymru - the Welsh Government now has just three years to achieve its remaining goals. A consultation on the licensing and registration of more activities involving animals is expected before the end of 2023, with this expected to include animal welfare establishments such as sanctuaries, rescues and rehoming centres, as well as animal exhibits. With the festive season fast approaching, unregulated exhibits featuring reindeers will soon take place across Wales, offering a timely reminder of the importance of the latter. RSPCA Cymru has long called for a focus on these often forgotten animals whose welfare may be sadly compromised among the upcoming fun and festivities.

Action needed to protect primate welfare in Wales. With the RSPCA currently involved in a new case involving pet monkeys in Wales, we're continuing our calls for the keeping of primates as pets to be outlawed. Over the summer, Defra consulted on the potential licensing of primate ownership in England, with the outcome of this consultation expected soon. However, with the Welsh Government having the competency to prohibit the keeping of primates as pets altogether, we're still keen to see such action being taken. With the King's Speech taking place on November 7, it is hoped that new reserved legislation relevant to animal welfare will be announced, paving the way for improvements to the lives of numerous animals in Wales. With there being the potential for the announcement of new bills to tackle live exports, puppy smuggling and livestock worrying, the animal welfare sector is currently waiting - and hoping - to see some welcome announcements that will alleviate the disappointment that followed the withdrawal of the Kept Animals Bill earlier this year,

Promoting responsible dog ownership in Wales

With a Senedd debate and a relevant Welsh Government-convened summit having taken place over the last month, responsible dog ownership has been high on the political agenda in Wales of late. With the UK Government having also announced that a new type will be added to Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (DDA) for the first time since the legislation was introduced in 1991, issues relevant to dogs have also been a focal point further afield.

On September 15, the UK Government announced that the American XL Bully will become a prohibited breed in the UK, along with the already-banned Pit Bull Terrier, Japanese Tosa, Fila Brasileiro and Dogo Argentino, before the end of 2023. Legislation to enact this before the end of the year was laid on October 31. While the RSPCA agrees that strong action is needed to protect human and animal welfare following a series of serious and fatal incidents, we are among the many organisations concerned that banning certain breeds of dog will not achieve this. We are also deeply concerned that the forthcoming ban will place further pressure on the already-overburdened rescue sector. With many rescue and rehoming centres currently at capacity - and with many organisations including the RSPCA currently heavily reliant on private boarding establishments - we are concerned that space for seized and/or abandoned dogs will be scarce. The forthcoming ban is also likely to impact heavily on both animal and human welfare, with rescue and veterinary staff potentially expected to care for and/or euthanise thousands of dogs. Because of this, it is vital that the unintended consequences of the ban on XL Bullies is given due consideration by governments on both sides of the border and that provisions are put in place to alleviate the pressure on the rescue sector as soon as realistically possible. These calls formed part of the evidence we gave to the UK Government's EFRA (Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) committee on October 18.

As the Dangerous Dogs Act is not a piece of devolved legislation, we have been calling on the Welsh Government to undertake a proactive approach in terms of reminding dog owners in Wales of their obligation to keep their animal under proper control in all places, at all times. We took these calls to the Welsh Government's summit on responsible dog ownership which also took place on October 18. This summit provided stakeholders with an important opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas and marked what will hopefully be the start of a joined-up approach towards mitigating the issues around irresponsible dog ownership in Wales.

While a public awareness campaign would provide the Welsh Government with a means of taking action to promote responsible dog ownership in the interim of any legislative changes, we are still keen to see a focus on the relevant pre-existing legislation during this Senedd term. In the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales it is stated that the Welsh Government will consider updates to the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014. RSPCA Cymru has long called for these regulations to be revisited and widened to include an additional focus on the socialisation and enrichment of puppies, as well as establishing a requirement for unannounced inspections and a reduction in the controversial staff-dog ratio that currently exists for breeding establishments. The way a dog is bred, reared and socialised as a puppy has a long-term impact on their behaviour and we encourage the Welsh Government to ensure that this is reflected appropriately in all devolved legislation relevant to dog breeding. A focus on updating this legislation could also see a much-needed focus on tackling unregulated canine fertility clinics, which often see untrained individuals performing procedures that should only be carried out by veterinary professionals. RSPCA Cymru is among the many organisations concerned around the prevalence of these clinics and therefore calls on the Welsh Government to consider what more could be done to protect the welfare of the animals within these establishments.

Questions to consider:

- 1. What additional support will be given to Wales' local authorities to carry out their statutory duty to pick up stray dogs, particularly if they are suspected American Bully XLs?**
- 2. What consideration has the Welsh Government given towards the unintended consequences on the forthcoming UK Government ban on American XL Bullies in terms of its impact on the animal rescue sector in Wales?**
- 3. Can the Minister confirm whether the Welsh Government still intends to consider updates to the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014 during this Senedd term?**

Animal Welfare Plan for Wales - two years on

With two years having passed since the Welsh Government launched its Animal Welfare Plan for Wales (AWPW), this November provides a timely opportunity to reflect on its progress to date. RSPCA Cymru was among the many organisations who welcomed the publication of the plan in 2021, which features the four animal welfare commitments outlined in the [Programme for Government](#), along with other relevant areas of focus. Clear progress has been made in terms of some commitments, such as the introduction of CCTV in all slaughterhouses, with this expected to be rolled out in Wales early next year at the latest. However, with the end of another year almost upon us, the Welsh Government now has just three years to ensure that the AWPW is delivered in full.

Plans to require licensing and registration for animal welfare establishments (AWEs) and mobile animal exhibits included in the AWPW remain particularly welcome, with us having long called for such action from the Welsh Government. In an answer to a [question on AWEs](#) by Luke Fletcher MS in May, the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd committed to the launch of a relevant consultation before the end of 2023. RSPCA Cymru is among the many organisations who look forward to contributing towards this consultation, with the inclusion of a question relevant to racing greyhounds also expected. A focus on mobile animal exhibits around Christmas would be particularly relevant, with displays and parades featuring reindeer expected across Wales with the festive season fast approaching.

Reindeer are complex creatures that are very susceptible to many health and welfare problems, including a tendency to become easily stressed. While reindeer are kept in the UK year-around, demand for them significantly increases around this time of year for them to be on display at festive events. Specialist deer vets report a range of problems in reindeer kept in the UK, including a lack of weight gain, weight loss, diarrhoea, poor muscle development, poor antler growth, malformed antlers, low fertility and high calf mortality. Because of this, we hope that the forthcoming consultation will eventually ensure that welfare standards for animals used in mobile exhibits will be put in place to make this the one of last Christmases where reindeer are suffering in silence.

As it stands, only a one-off registration is required in Wales under the Performing Animals (Regulation) Act 1925 to display reindeer, with no requirement to carry out inspections, nor standards to inspect against. Within the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales, mobile animals exhibits are cited as one of the areas which could be potentially included in revised proposals for the licensing of activities involving animals. RSPCA Cymru is calling for such exhibits to be licenced and inspected in Wales, to ensure the welfare of animals such as the reindeer, who find themselves in high demand at this time of year. Other popular mobile animal exhibits include falconry displays, petting zoos and circuses with domesticated animals - all of which are not currently subject to sufficient checks in Wales. While the use of wild animals in circuses was made illegal in Wales back in 2020, this legislation does not apply to domestic animals such as dogs, cats, horses, rabbits, pigeons or doves.

While the AWW was - and is still - very much welcome, RSPCA Cymru is keen to establish whether any of the commitments made in the plan will be impacted by the recently announced [budget cuts to some portfolios](#). On October 17, it was announced that the Rural Affairs portfolio will see a £20 million decrease. While it is suggested that this will be taken from Rural Investment Schemes, assurances that these - or future - budget cuts will not impact the AWPW during these financially challenging times would still be much welcome.

Questions to consider:

- 1. What assessment has the Welsh Government made of the progress of the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales since its publication two years ago?**
- 2. Can the Minister provide a timeframe for the licensing of animal welfare establishments and mobile animal exhibits following the Welsh Government's forthcoming consultation on these matters?**
- 3. Can the Minister confirm if the relevant funding for the delivery of the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales is secure following the recently announced reduction in the Rural Affairs portfolio's budget?**

Outlawing the keeping of primates as pets in Wales

With the King's Speech taking place in the next week, the animal welfare sector is currently waiting to see whether any of the commitments made in the withdrawn Kept Animals Bill (KAB) will be carried forward via reserved legislation. With there being the potential for the announcement of bills relevant to livestock worrying, puppy smuggling, live exports and other issues, it is hoped that November 7 will offer some much-needed hope after the disappointment that followed when KAB was withdrawn back in May. With the three aforementioned issues that could find themselves in the spotlight being reserved to the UK Government, it is hoped that next week's announcement will also pave the way for improvements to the lives of countless animals in Wales.

Several of the issues KAB looked to legislate on, such as imports and exports and criminal offences, fell outside of the Welsh Government's legislative competency, hence the previous appetite for a joined-up approach as outlined in the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales. However, at least one of the Bill's previous provisions could be acted on by the Welsh Government - the keeping of primates as pets. Across the border, Defra is considering the licensing of primate ownership through secondary legislation under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, with a relevant consultation having taken place over the summer. While the outcome of this consultation has not yet been published, it is hoped that steps will soon be taken to protect primate welfare in England. While this would be hugely welcomed by the RSPCA and others, the Welsh Government could go even further still by outlawing the practice altogether - further demonstrating Wales' ability to lead the way when it comes to animal welfare.

Previous estimates suggest there around [120 primates](#) being kept as pets in Wales - with RSPCA Cymru having long called for this practice to be outlawed. The Welsh Government previously held reservations in terms of whether this issue needed to be tackled in Wales due to a lack of evidence, despite previous polling showing that approximately [72% of the Welsh public](#) believe primate ownership should be banned. RSPCA Cymru strongly believes that primate ownership in domestic settings is both cruel and dangerous as the keeping of these intelligent, sociable and complex animals in a household environment is incompatible with their wild nature. With recent research from RSPCA Cymru suggesting that pet monkeys are still being sold over the internet in Wales, we're renewing our calls for the Welsh Government to consider whether it should undertake its own approach to protect primate welfare.

Banning the keeping of primates as pets has strong support among Members of the Senedd, with both the Welsh Conservatives and Plaid Cymru featuring commitments to outlaw the practice in their 2021 Senedd manifestos. Wales has repeatedly demonstrated its will to set its own high standards of animal welfare, therefore a domestic focus on primate ownership could further demonstrate this while saving pet monkeys from a life of misery in inappropriate settings. With the RSPCA having been required to become involved in two separate cases involving pet monkeys in Wales since 2021, we're calling on the Welsh Government to consider what could be done to tackle this worrying trend.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Has the Welsh Government has held any relevant conversations with its UK counterparts in terms of whether the King's Speech will improve animal welfare in Wales?**
- 2. What is the Minister's stance on outlawing the private keeping of primates in Wales?**
- 3. What further consideration has the Welsh Government given towards prohibiting the ownership of primates as pets in Wales?**

RSPCA Cymru incidents August - October 2023

From August to October 2023, the RSPCA responded to 3,034 incidents across Wales - an 18% 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 | August 2022 - October 2022 | August 2023 - October 2023 |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Blaenau Gwent | 99 | 70 |
| Bridgend | 173 | 122 |
| Caerphilly | 172 | 169 |
| Cardiff | 379 | 332 |
| Carmarthenshire | 221 | 191 |
| Ceredigion | 85 | 53 |
| Conwy | 196 | 145 |
| Denbighshire | 200 | 133 |
| Flintshire | 150 | 114 |
| Gwynedd | 138 | 117 |
| Isle of Anglesey | 114 | 77 |
| Merthyr Tydfil | 92 | 54 |
| Monmouthshire | 85 | 64 |
| Neath Port Talbot | 189 | 173 |
| Newport | 195 | 163 |
| Pembrokeshire | 177 | 133 |
| Powys | 140 | 118 |
| Rhondda Cynon Taff | 217 | 216 |
| Swansea | 363 | 277 |
| The Vale of Glamorgan | 125 | 135 |
| Torfaen | 79 | 59 |
| Wrexham | 136 | 119 |
| TOTAL | 3,725 | 3,034 |

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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