

Briefing document

Banning the giving of pets as prizes in Wales

June 2023

Summary of Points

- Animal ownership is a big responsibility - one that should be planned and well thought out. Animals often do not have their welfare needs met prior to, during, and after being given as prizes. Because of this, we actively discourage people against taking on an animal in a spontaneous, ill-planned manner
- Between 2015 and 2022, 38 cases of live animals being given as prizes in Wales were reported to the RSPCA, although the total number of incidents is likely to be much higher. While the majority of cases relate to goldfish being given away at fairgrounds, RSPCA Cymru has received calls relating to dogs, cats, ducklings and even horses being offered as prizes through a range of channels, such as social media
- Being given away as a prize can be extremely detrimental to the welfare of an animal. Sadly, many goldfish will die before even getting back to their new homes, or shortly after
- RSPCA Cymru believes the current legislative provisions under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 do not go far enough, and would like to see Wales introduce legislation similar to Scotland's. The Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 makes it is an offence to give an animal as a prize to anyone, regardless of their age, except within the family context - such as a parent rewarding their child's achievements with a new pet, for example
- Wales' local authorities have the opportunity to ban the giving of live animals as prizes on council-owned land to ensure the welfare of these animals is not compromised. They can also assist by raising public awareness of the issue and can lead the way in terms of prohibiting this outdated practice
- **Twelve of Wales' local authorities have already taken this step - including, most recently, Flintshire County Council**

The legislative position

The RSPCA is opposed to the giving of live animals as prizes. We have long discouraged this practice by asking members of the public not to attend any showgrounds, fairs or other events where live animals are being given as prizes

The Animal Welfare Act (AWA) was introduced in Wales and England in 2006, in a bid to improve animal welfare across the two countries. While this legislation remains one of the most important for animals in Wales, it could go further in terms of protecting the welfare of pets issued as prizes.

Section 11 of the AWA makes it an offence to give an animal as a prize to anyone under the age of 16, unless they are accompanied by someone over the age of 16, or it is within the family context. However, RSPCA Cymru believes this legislation could be strengthened to help protect the welfare of animals currently issued as prizes by prohibiting this practice.

'Prize' animals are frequently kept and transported in conditions which do not meet their needs, with this often resulting in their death before their new owners can even get them home. As such, RSPCA Cymru advocates for a legislative move similar to Scotland's, as set out under Section 31 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. This act makes it an offence for an animal to be given as a prize to anyone regardless of their age, except where given within the family context.¹

Despite current legislative requirements, RSPCA Cymru is concerned that many 'prize pets' are being given to individuals aged under 16. This not only highlights issues around the enforcement of existing provisions, but also demonstrates the need to rethink our approach towards this practice.

The need for a voluntary ban

RSPCA Cymru believes the introduction of an outright ban on pets as prizes, on both public and private land, by the Welsh Government would be the most effective means of preventing animals from being thoughtlessly given away.

However, by implementing bans on the council-owned land they are responsible for, Wales' local authorities could deliver a powerful message to their local community, Welsh Government and their equivalents elsewhere. Councils not only have the opportunity to ban the giving of live animals as prizes on their land, but can also raise wider public awareness as to the impact this practice has on the welfare of the animals in the process.

By adopting a ban, local authorities across Wales would be following in the footsteps of others who have already banned the giving of live animals as prizes on their land. The councils who have already banned the giving of pets as prizes in Wales are: Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Conwy, Flintshire, Neath Port Talbot, Newport, Pembrokeshire, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Torfaen County Borough, the Vale of Glamorgan and Wrexham.

RSPCA Cymru believes the more local authorities that take action, the greater the possibility of us achieving an eventual ban on this outdated practice.

Animals as prizes and the impact on their welfare

RSPCA Cymru is firmly opposed to the giving of live animals as prizes. Animal ownership is a big responsibility that needs to be planned and well-thought out in order to help provide the best quality of life for that animal - as opposed to a spur-of-the-moment event resulting from a game.

While a range of animals are given as prizes each year, goldfish are most commonly associated with this practice. Goldfish are easily stressed and very often fish that are won as prizes suffer miserably from shock, oxygen starvation or die from changes in water temperature, and many will sadly die before their new owners can get them home.

¹ [Animal Health and Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#)

People who are given goldfish as prizes seldom have an aquarium set up already so may keep them in unsuitable environments - such as fish bowls - and some fish may even get illegally dumped in local waterways. Fish bowls are considered unsuitable as they do not allow for appropriate oxygenation of the water and keeping fish in a small volume of water will also lead to high levels of ammonia, which can cause disease.

RSPCA Cymru data on pets as prizes

Reported incidents to RSPCA Cymru relating to pets as prizes							
Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022
Incidents	7	9	8	3	7	2	2

The above table shows a breakdown of reported incidents to the RSPCA relating to pets as prizes in Wales from 2015 to 2022, totalling 38 incidents. However, these statistics only show the number of incidents reported to the RSPCA concerning the welfare of animals given as prizes - it is likely the figure of incidences witnessed across Wales is far higher.

Case study - Barry Island Pleasure Park

Barry Island Pleasure Park is a popular destination for families across South Wales. While thousands of people visit the park during the summer months, the site's fairground is historically home to a stall giving goldfish away as prizes.

Previous reports made to the RSPCA include those of fish in bags hanging in direct sunlight. Another concerned six dead fish that could be seen lying in the plastic bags filled with "green slime" while the games continued. In response to these reports, the Shared Regulatory Services (SRS) devoted resources investigating reports about the welfare of goldfish being given as prizes at the fairground. These included claims that fish were being given as prizes to children aged under 16 years - an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

SRS - a partnership between Bridgend, Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Councils - continues to monitor issues surrounding the giving of goldfish as prizes. Positively, the Vale of Glamorgan Council became the fifth local authority in Wales to ban the practice on council land in 2021, after a relevant report was prepared for their cabinet.²

RSPCA advice on caring for goldfish

Goldfish and other fish can make excellent companion animals - with previous estimates suggesting 14% of all households in Wales own fish³. Contrary to popular opinion, fish can be challenging pets, as meeting their complex biological, environmental and behavioural needs takes a great deal of preparation, investment, time and care.

The welfare needs of fish should be carefully considered before they are purchased as a pet. Prospective owners of pet fish should thoroughly research the needs of the particular species they are interested in

² Vale of Glamorgan News - [Council plans to ban events that offer pets as prizes on its land](#), 22 September 2021

³ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-03/national-survey-wales-pet-welfare-2014-15.pdf>

and what is required to care for them using expert sources, and should only consider keeping one/some if they are fully confident they can provide for those needs. Owners need to make sure they can give their animal the environment it needs and that they have the facilities, time, financial means and long-term commitment to maintain a good standard of care, as required under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

Information on how to meet the welfare needs of fish is available on the RSPCA's website via [our guide on the care of freshwater fish](#). Some examples of these welfare needs are:

- Goldfish need an aquarium or tank with a filter and regularly changed water - the water should be between 10 and 21 degrees centigrade. Other species of fish kept as pets can require very different water temperatures - and owners should research this requirement thoroughly
- The number of fish you can keep in an aquarium depends not only on the water quality but also the behavioural needs of the fish. Despite goldfish typically being a single species, there are many different varieties and not all varieties of goldfish should be kept together in a tank
- It is important to supplement fish food flakes with other foods for balanced nutrition and enrichment. Goldfish enjoy chopped vegetable matter like lettuce or spinach and they will also nibble on aquatic plants. For other species of pet fish, research should always be done to find the appropriate food
- It is important to be aware of common signs of illness in goldfish, what might cause these illnesses, and how they should be treated. A vet should be consulted if their behaviour or appearance changes
- Furnishings and enrichment designed for the specific behaviours of goldfish should be provided. This could include places to hide in their tanks via plants, secure branches, rocks or artificial decorations

When preparing to bring a fish home for the first time, the RSPCA strongly advises that new owners use 'fishless cycling'. This involves running the tank filter before adding any fish for at least two weeks.

Example of a motion to ban animals being given as prizes on council-owned land

Local authorities implementing local bans can help by eliminating the giving of pets as prizes on council-owned land across Wales. Outlined below is an example of a motion that local authorities across Wales could adopt to support the banning of animals being given as prizes on council land:

This Council:

- is concerned about the number of cases reported to the RSPCA each year, regarding pets given as prizes via fairgrounds, social media, and other channels in Wales
- is concerned for the welfare of those animals that are being given as prizes
- recognises that many cases of pets being as prizes may go unreported each year
- supports a move to ban the giving of live animals as prizes, in any form, on [insert council name]'s land

The Council agrees to:

- Ban outright the giving of live animals as prizes, in any form, on [insert council name]'s land
- Write to the Welsh Government, urging an outright ban on the giving of live animals as prizes on both public and private land