



RSPCA Rolling Briefing

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

| Date of questions: | Tabled by: |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 12th of July 2023 | 3.30pm on 5th July 2023 |

Recent animal welfare updates

New Animal Kindness Index launched by the RSPCA. The RSPCA has unveiled the findings of our latest Animal Kindness Index, as we begin to look ahead to our 200 year anniversary in 2024. The Kindness Index is an annual UK-wide survey into the public's attitudes towards animals, which allows us to find out what values people hold when it comes to our fellow beings. While this year's results show that 71% of people in Wales class themselves as 'animal lovers', the survey also demonstrates the public's varying understanding of animal sentience. As a result, RSPCA Cymru is renewing our calls for animal sentience to be enshrined in Welsh law to help promote the fact that, just like us, animals can experience both positive and negative emotional states. We strongly believe recognising animal sentience in all Welsh legislation - and the creation of a Sentience Committee for Wales - would send the strongest possible message that the welfare and status of animals is both acknowledged and respected here.

Latest injury and retirement data published by GBGB. The Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) has published its newest data, with their latest statistics showing that thousands of injuries are still occurring at licensed tracks across England. Meanwhile, 244 registered dogs died in 2022 for reasons such as the cost of veterinary treatment, euthanasia at tracksides or because they were designated unsuitable for rehoming. However, these new figures do not cover Wales, with the Valley Greyhound Stadium in Ystrad Mynach still operating as an independent flapping track. Wales' only track is under no obligation to record or share statistics on whether dogs are being injured or killed there while racing, meaning we have no clear idea of the current situation here. Wales is one of only ten countries where commercial greyhound racing still takes place, alongside England, Scotland and Ireland, and we continue to call on the Welsh Government to consider the phasing-out of greyhound racing in its upcoming consultation.

Strong support for compulsory cat microchipping in Wales. To support our calls for mandatory cat microchipping in Wales, RSPCA Cymru has undertaken new research into the public's demand for such a requirement. Our new data shows that almost two thirds of adults in Wales believe the Welsh Government should make cat microchipping a legal requirement - with this rising to 75% among current cat owners. Meanwhile, 70% of the Welsh public agree that compulsory microchipping would improve cat welfare, while three-quarters also believe it would help reduce the number of lost and stray felines. Pet owners in England have until June 10 2024 to microchip their cats, following the introduction of new legislation at a UK Government level. With the end of another Senedd year fast approaching, we're now urging the Welsh Government to fully commit to compulsory cat microchipping to improve feline welfare and help alleviate pressure on the already overburdened animal rescue sector.

RSPCA Cymru renews calls for a ban on pets as prizes in Wales. With the summer holidays fast approaching, RSPCA Cymru is calling for action to prevent pets being given out as prizes across Wales. So far, twelve local authorities have banned the giving out of pets as prizes on council-owned land in Wales, but more is needed to protect animals - predominantly goldfish - from this practice. The RSPCA is currently in the midst of re-launching our #NoFunAtTheFair campaign, calling for the giving of pets as prizes to be banned on a national level. In recent years, there have been 38 instances of pets being given out as prizes in Wales reported to the RSPCA - however, we fear many incidents involving this practice go unreported. In turn, RSPCA Cymru is calling on the Welsh Government to introduce Wales-wide legislation to bring forward an outright ban on the practice of giving pets as prizes, on both private and council-owned land, to protect animal welfare.

Wales a nation of ‘animal lovers’, according to new Kindness Index

To gather an up-to-date perspective of the public’s attitudes towards animals, the RSPCA has launched and published the results of its second annual Animal Kindness Index. The Kindness Index is a UK-wide survey the RSPCA launched last year, as we look ahead to our 200th anniversary on June 16 2024. Unsurprisingly, our latest survey shows that a clear majority of the Welsh public class themselves as ‘animal lovers’ - with more people considering themselves as such in Wales than any other UK nation.

Despite many struggling against the backdrop of the ongoing cost of living crisis, this year’s Kindness Index found that animal welfare is still among the most important causes to people in Wales, along with mental health and poverty in the UK. In terms of the issues relating to animal welfare the public are most concerned about, harmful dog breeding practices and the puppy trade came out on top, closely followed by intensive farming and wildlife protection.

While our survey found that 71% of the Welsh public class themselves as ‘animal lovers’, even more (89%) wish to see animal welfare protected by legislation. Among the most insightful findings of the Kindness Index were those relating to animal sentience. This year’s results show the Welsh public are familiar with the concept of animal sentience - but only when this is applied to certain animals. For example, 95% understand that dogs are sentient, with this falling to just over three quarters when applying this to chickens and rats. However, these percentages fell drastically when discussing animals such as fish and crustaceans - despite these species being legally classed as sentient outside of Wales¹.

The UK Government passed its Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act last year, which means that sentience is formally recognised in UK law, including reserved legislation applying to Wales². An Animal Sentience Committee was established in May to consider how UK government policy decisions take account of animal welfare. However, as we have yet to enshrine animal sentience in Welsh law, animals in Wales are technically under less protection than those in other areas of the UK. Previous RSPCA research has shown that approximately three quarters (73%) of our inspectors believe that animal cruelty is committed because some people do not understand that animals are sentient with feelings and emotions. With our emergency line receiving more than one million calls annually, we are concerned that a lack of understanding of animal sentience is a contributing factor. Because of this, we believe the acknowledgement of animal sentience in Welsh law - and establishing an Animal Sentience Committee for Wales, as per England and Scotland - would send the strongest possible message that the welfare and status of animals is respected here. In turn, this could help reduce cruelty to animals in Wales, with RSPCA Cymru still receiving 1,000+ reports a month, as it stands.

The latest Index also showed that 89% of the Welsh public believe that animal welfare should be taught in schools. Teachers in Wales have an advantage over their counterparts in other areas of the UK in this respect as the new curriculum gives them the flexibility to cover animal welfare under an Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE) such as humanities. Better teaching of animal sentience in schools something which a new [Statement of Opinion](#) recently tabled by Vikki Howells MS encourages. This statement also acknowledges that a lack of understanding around sentience could be contributing to animal cruelty in Wales, while calling on the Welsh Government to enshrine animal sentience in Welsh law. With Wales having demonstrated its ability to be a leader in terms of animal welfare in recent years, paying legal regards to animal sentience could go a long way towards ensuring every animal in Wales ‘has a good quality of life’, as intended by the Welsh Government.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Has the Welsh Government given any further consideration towards paying legal regard to animal sentience in Welsh legislation?**
- 2. Does the Welsh Government have any plans to establish an Animal Sentience Committee for Wales, as per England and Scotland?**
- 3. How is the Welsh Government encouraging educators in Wales to maximise the opportunities provided by the new Welsh curriculum in terms of teaching animal welfare and sentience in schools?**

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/lobsters-octopus-and-crabs-recognised-as-sentient-beings>

² <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2021/june/lords-discuss-key-areas-of-animal-welfare-sentience-bill/>

Mandatory cat microchipping much-needed in Wales

With the end of another Senedd year fast approaching, RSPCA Cymru is calling on the Welsh Government to commit to the compulsory cat microchipping in Wales before summer recess. To demonstrate the public's appetite for such requirements, we have conducted new polling which shows strong support for these potential measures. According to our new research, 75% of current cat owners in Wales believe the Welsh Government should make cat microchipping a mandatory requirement. Our polling also found that three-quarters of Welsh adults believe such measures would help reduce the number of lost and stray felines, while 70% of the Welsh public agree that compulsory microchipping would improve cat welfare in Wales. Along with many other animal rescues and rehoming centres, the RSPCA often receives unchipped cats into our care, with it being almost impossible to reunite lost cats who haven't been microchipped with their owners. With us ensuring that every cat is microchipped before leaving our centres - and with unchipped cats facing longer waits before they can be adopted - this also requires significant use of charity resources.

Following the introduction of mandatory cat microchipping in England, pet owners have until June 10 2024 to microchip their felines or risk facing a £500 fine. The RSPCA was among the many animal welfare organisations who welcomed the introduction of these new requirements, and is now calling on the Welsh Government to follow suit. As it stands in Wales, puppies and dogs over eight weeks of age are legally required to be microchipped, but kittens and cats are currently exempt from these requirements. In the [Animal Welfare Plan for Wales](#), the Welsh Government committed to collating evidence alongside the Scottish and UK Governments with regards to the benefits of cat microchipping. With it likely that a high proportion of dogs are already microchipped in Wales as it is a legislative requirement, the Welsh Government now needs to consider the implementation of cat microchipping, as promised. Not only would such a move encourage responsible pet ownership on a wider scale, but could also ensure dogs and cats are granted more equal legal protection and help bring parity between the two species.

Microchipping is a safe and simple procedure, where a small chip is inserted under the skin, giving an animal their own unique code. The microchip can be scanned and matched to the owner's contact details, which are then kept on a national database. Thousands of pets are lost every year, with many never reunited with their owners. Microchipping pets - and making it compulsory to chip both dogs and cats in Wales - gives them the best chance of being identified and returned if lost or stolen. The RSPCA currently offers the microchipping of dogs and cats to the general public from £10 per pet, with Cats Protection and RSPCA Cymru running a joint neutering and microchipping campaign in Wales where pets from low-income households can be microchipped for just £5³.

Along with many members of the Welsh public, RSPCA Cymru fully believes mandatory microchipping could pave the way for reuniting more lost cats with their owners. Losing a cat and not knowing where they are or what has become of them can be significantly distressing for animal owners. Making cat microchipping a legal requirement could also proactively reduce and assist with accountability in terms of abandonments - with the number of cases involving potentially abandoned animals up by 25% in Wales, according to the latest statistics from our frontline. With many animal rescues full to capacity and struggling against the backdrop of the ongoing cost of living crisis, it is our view that any measures that could alleviate pressure on the industry while improving welfare should be given due consideration.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Has the Minister given any further consideration towards the introduction of mandatory cat microchipping in Wales, either via its own regulations or through legislative consent?**
- 2. Has the Minister held any new conversations with the UK and Scottish Governments with regard to the benefits of compulsory cat microchipping?**
- 3. Does the Minister agree that making cat microchipping a legal requirement could help protect feline welfare while reducing the number of animal abandonments in Wales?**

³ <https://www.cats.org.uk/what-we-do/neutering/neutering-campaigns/walescampaign>

Latest GBGB data shows inherent risks associated with greyhound racing

On June 21, the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) - the self-regulating organisation which oversees licensed racing - released its annual injury and retirement data. These new statistics show that 4,354 injuries were sustained at licensed tracks across England, while 244 racing greyhounds died in 2022 for reasons including the cost of veterinary treatment, euthanasia at tracksides or after being designated unsuitable for rehoming⁴. 20 tracks in England fall under GBGB's jurisdiction which means that each stadium saw an average of 217.7 injuries and more than four deaths each over the course of the year. Furthermore, the new statistics continue to highlight the industry's heavy reliance on the rescue sector - with more than two thirds of retired racing greyhounds (69.9%) handed over to trusts and charities at the end of their careers.

The latest number of fatalities are in addition to the 2,000+ dogs that have died since 2018 due to their participation in greyhound racing. GBGB's newest statistics continue to illustrate the number of needless injuries and deaths occurring for 'entertainment' purposes in the UK. While the injury rate has remained consistent at 1.2% for the second year running, it has still increased from 1.16% in 2018. Despite this new data having been published, there still remains a lack of transparency and traceability within the licensed racing industry in terms of the number of greyhounds being born in - and imported into - the UK every year. In turn, it is difficult to navigate the experience of each individual greyhound bred for racing, along with their welfare. Taking the latest data into account, the RSPCA still firmly believes the only way to safeguard the welfare of dogs within the racing industry is to phase it out entirely. Wales' only track - the Valley Greyhound Stadium in Ystrad Mynach - is currently unlicensed and independent, with there being no requirement for them to record or share the number of dogs injured - or worse - there. However, the track is currently seeking to obtain a license from GBGB, which means that Wales could soon find itself adding to these figures in the future. As it stands, we are awaiting the outcome of the three planning applications that have been submitted by the track to Caerphilly County Borough Council to assist with the potential intensification of racing at the stadium.

Previously, the RSPCA spent decades working with the industry in order to secure welfare improvements for racing greyhounds. However, with there being significant welfare issues for these greyhounds we believe cannot be resolved, we changed our position to call for a phased end to greyhound racing in 2022, alongside Blue Cross and Dogs Trust. Along with the aforementioned charities, we have joined together with Hope Rescue and Greyhound Rescue Wales to call for a phased end to greyhound racing in Wales. It is evident from the data published by GBGB each year that regulation cannot guarantee the welfare of every racing greyhound, and does not protect these dogs from the inherent risks associated with the industry. On March 8, the Senedd debated greyhound racing following a petition from Hope Rescue calling for an end to the industry in Wales which had been signed by 35k+ people - including 18.7k from Wales. This petition amassed more signatures than any finalised petition to come before this Petitions Committee since its inception in 2021 - and was recently nominated for Senedd 'Petition of the Year'. More recently, a [Statement of Opinion](#) tabled by Carolyn Thomas MS, encourages the Senedd to recognise this petition, while also noting the cross-party support in the Senedd, as well as among the Welsh public, for an end to the industry in Wales. This statement has been signed by 17 Members of the Senedd so far, and was co-submitted by a further seven.

RSPCA Cymru strongly believes greyhound racing should be phased out entirely as the risk of death and injury posed to racing greyhounds has no place in a modern and compassionate Wales. With a Welsh Government consultation expected before the end of 2023, it is widely hoped this outdated industry will soon be consigned to the history books in Wales - by both animal welfare charities and many members of the public.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Does the Minister hold concerns around the safety of regulated greyhound racing following the publication of the latest data by the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB)?**
- 2. Can the Minister confirm if she has held any relevant conversations with Caerphilly County Borough Council since committing to a consultation on greyhound racing in Wales?**
- 3. Can the Minister make a statement on the progression of the Welsh Government's consultation on greyhound racing?**

⁴ <https://gbgb-prod-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/20093800/2018-2022-Injury-Retirement-Summary-Final.pdf>

RSPCA Cymru concerned that pets are still being given as prizes in Wales

As thousands of families look towards the start of the summer holidays in July, RSPCA Cymru is renewing its calls for a ban on the giving of pets as prizes in Wales. Positively, more than half (12/22) of Wales' local authorities have banned the giving away of pets as prizes on council-owned land. The councils who have banned the giving of pets as prizes in Wales so far are: Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Conwy, Flintshire, Neath Port Talbot, Newport, Pembrokeshire, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Torfaen County Borough, the Vale of Glamorgan and Wrexham. While this many councils taking action undoubtedly marks a positive step forward, Wales-wide legislation is needed to ensure this outdated practice can no longer pose a threat to animal welfare. Animal ownership is a big responsibility, and should always be the result of a pre-planned and well-thought out process. However, due to the spontaneous nature of pets being given as prizes, animals often do not have their welfare needs met prior to, during, and after being given away. In fact, many goldfish die before they even reach their new homes.

38 incidents of pets being given out as prizes have been reported to RSPCA Cymru in recent years, with a majority of cases relating to goldfish being given away at fairgrounds. It is illegal under the provisions of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to give any animal as a prize to anyone under the age of sixteen, unless they are accompanied by someone above that age. Having received reports that fish are illegally given away to children younger than 16 in some cases, RSPCA Cymru calls on the Welsh Government to consider mirroring Scotland's legislative approach. Under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, it is an offence for an animal to be given as a prize to anyone regardless of their age, except within a family context - such as a parent rewarding their child's achievements with a new pet, for example.

While RSPCA Cymru has received reports around many species being given away or raffled as pets in Wales - including dogs, cats, ducklings and even horses - goldfish are still the most common animal associated with this practice. These sentient animals are easily stressed and very often, goldfish that are won as prizes can experience suffering as a result of shock and/or oxygen starvation, or may die from changes to water temperature. Those who win fish as prizes seldom have the advance provisions in place needed to care for their new pet, due to the spur-of-the-moment nature of winning a goldfish from a game. As a result, many will keep their goldfish in unsuitable environments, such as fish bowls, with some fish even known to have been dumped in illegal waterways. Fish bowls are considered widely unsuitable from a welfare perspective as they do not allow for the appropriate oxygenation of the water. Meanwhile, aquariums need to be set up at least two weeks before a fish is introduced to its new environment to ensure the water is safe for them to live in, which is not possible when fish are won as a prize.

Goldfish and other fish can make excellent companion animals - with previous estimates suggesting 14% of all households in Wales own fish⁵. Contrary to popular opinion, they can be challenging pets, as meeting their complex biological, environmental and behavioural needs takes a great deal of preparation, investment and care. Prospective owners of pet fish should thoroughly research the needs of the particular species they are interested in 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. All owners should ensure they can give their animal the environment it needs and that they have the facilities, time and long-term commitment to maintain a good standard of care. Unfortunately, numerous fairgrounds and fetes - including Barry Island Pleasure Park - still give away pets as prizes, despite ongoing welfare concerns. Because of this, RSPCA Cymru firmly believes that now is the time to finally end the giving away of pets as prizes to stop the suffering of these often forgotten animals.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Can the Minister confirm if the Welsh Government has any plans to introduce a Wales-wide ban on the giving of pets as prizes?**
- 2. How is the Welsh Government working with local authorities and other stakeholders to reduce the number of pets such as goldfish being given away as prizes in Wales?**
- 3. What evidence would the Welsh Government require to commit to a national ban on the giving of pets such as goldfish as prizes in Wales?**

⁵ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-03/national-survey-wales-pet-welfare-2014-15.pdf>

RSPCA Cymru incidents April 2023 - June 2023

From April to June 2023, the RSPCA responded to 3,254 incidents across Wales - a 23% 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 | April 2022 - June 2022 | April 2023 - June 2023 |
|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Blaenau Gwent | 95 | 92 |
| Bridgend | 189 | 107 |
| Caerphilly | 215 | 177 |
| Cardiff | 526 | 352 |
| Carmarthenshire | 268 | 212 |
| Ceredigion | 54 | 72 |
| Conwy | 206 | 167 |
| Denbighshire | 164 | 143 |
| Flintshire | 204 | 146 |
| Gwynedd | 121 | 117 |
| Isle of Anglesey | 116 | 82 |
| Merthyr Tydfil | 63 | 59 |
| Monmouthshire | 83 | 64 |
| Neath Port Talbot | 242 | 177 |
| Newport | 201 | 153 |
| Pembrokeshire | 153 | 135 |
| Powys | 149 | 138 |
| Rhondda Cynon Taff | 254 | 218 |
| Swansea | 403 | 321 |
| The Vale of Glamorgan | 186 | 117 |
| Torfaen | 123 | 86 |
| Wrexham | 184 | 119 |
| TOTAL | 4,199 | 3,254 |

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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