



**COMPANION
ANIMAL WELFARE
GROUP WALES**



**GRŴP LLES
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ANWES
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Priorities for the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

Background:

The **Companion Animal Welfare Group Wales (CAWGW)** is a sector group that brings together specific expertise and focus, with the aim of improving the welfare of companion animals in Wales. Established in 2018, the group includes Blue Cross, Dogs Trust, Cats Protection, PDSA, The Kennel Club, Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, as well as two associate members: The Dog Breeding Reform Group and Friends of the Animals Wales. Collectively these organisations provide services and support for thousands of companion animals across Wales including pet care and veterinary clinics, rehoming services, information centres, community and school education and outreach, as well as a range of other services.

Suggested Priorities:

Review the Welsh Government's dog breeding legislation and explore the need to introduce further measures to ensure high welfare breeding practices across the board resulting in healthy and well socialised puppies

The breeding and sale of companion animals in Wales, particularly dogs and cats, is an area in which CAWGW wants to see substantive improvements and new regulations to better safeguard the welfare of our nation's pets. Welfare issues related to the breeding and sale of dogs have been the subject of much publicity and include: current legislation proving ineffective at safeguarding animal welfare, a lack of enforcement of current animal welfare legislation, welfare issues at breeding and selling premises, an increase in illegal imports of puppies, as well as the need to educate the public about how to identify a responsible dog breeder.

The current dog breeding regulations have not resulted in the improved welfare CAWGW members want to see, with socialisation plans an enigma to many in the trade and large-scale breeding practices operating based on a quota of staff only, rather than a focus on positive outcomes for the health and welfare of puppies. The Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group recently conducted a review of the Animal Welfare (Dog Breeding) (Wales) Regulations 2014, recommending numerous improvements to the legislation to ensure 'high welfare standards for our nation's dogs.' CAWGW also welcomes the ongoing work of the Local Authority Enforcement Project to address the issues around the enforcement of the current legislation. However, it is unclear what scrutiny there is of this process.

It is imperative for the health and welfare of dogs that only responsible dog breeding practices are supported and promoted. Under the current system in Wales only dog breeders breeding 3 or more litters in a year require a licence and are subject to inspection. CAWGW wants transparency and traceability of all dogs being bred to tackle those breeding dogs with poor welfare standards. The majority of CAWGW members believe a system of registration and licensing of breeders could achieve this.

Explore the need to introduce regulation of cat breeding to ensure kittens are bred in high welfare conditions in Wales

Cat breeding is currently unregulated in Wales, unlike dog breeding. This means it is without the safeguards for cat welfare that regulation would provide. Most cat breeding occurs from a home-based setting and kittens are mostly sold by the breeder through online advertising sites.



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There are unscrupulous breeders who put profit before welfare resulting in kittens being bred in poor conditions, sold sick and often before they are 8 weeks of age. The pandemic has seen an increase in prices for kittens increasing the chances of consumers being duped into buying animals bred in poor welfare conditions. Some cats are also bred with genetic disorders and/or extreme conformation¹ which compromise their welfare and cause pain and suffering. Cat vending will shortly be covered under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021, however this does not fully account for the conditions in which kittens are bred, or the queen's or kitten's welfare.

CAWGW welcomed the 2019 consultation which addressed the breeding and selling of cats and kittens. However, there is much more that needs to be done to ensure owners can confidently acquire a healthy, happy cat from a responsible breeder. It would therefore be welcomed for the committee to explore where we are currently on cat breeding in Wales and potential routes to improving the situation.

Review the Microchipping of Dogs (Wales) Regulations 5 and introduce compulsory microchipping of owned cats in Wales

Microchipping is a safe permanent method of identifying a dog or an owned cat. However, there is currently no legal requirement to microchip owned cats. Although dog microchipping is a legal requirement in Wales there are well documented issues with compliance in particular because the keeper's details are not always kept up to date and there is inadequate enforcement. There are also challenges around the multiple different microchip databases and their processes. We need to ensure that the existence of multiple databases is not hindering lost and found pets being reunited with their owners and would suggest more checks on databases ensuring that they are compliant with the regulations.

Whilst the number of stray dogs seized by Local Authorities in Wales has reduced by almost 20% since the current Regulations came into force², the percentage of dogs that cannot be reunited with their owners due to not having a microchip or the microchip details being incorrect is increasing, taking up valuable Local Authority resources³.

We believe that a review of The Microchipping of Dogs (Wales) Regulations 2015 is needed, with a view to introducing Fixed Penalty Notices as an enforcement mechanism. This would offer a low-cost alternative to prosecution and be a deterrent for owners to ensure compliance with the Regulations, this would also provide Local Authorities with a funding stream for enforcement.

While the Welsh Government's Code of Practice for cats recommends that owners have their cats microchipped, in 2021 the PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report data shows that 30% of owned cats in Wales are not microchipped⁴. CAWGW believes that compulsory microchipping of owned cats should be introduced and would like the committee to explore the issue.

¹ Extreme conformation in cats can be defined as when an animal's body shape, structure or appearance has the potential to result in a negative impact on health and welfare.

² <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/about-us/publications/stray-dog-survey-report-2019>

³ https://bdch.org.uk/files/BATTERSEA_Microchip_Report_2021.pdf

⁴ <https://www.pdsa.org.uk/pawreport>